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THE TABLOID

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ANALYSIS

Who cares if the sky is falling? **PAGE 14**



Owen Gaster, 30, the futuristic tailor, proved himself a cut above at London Fashion Week yesterday when he unveiled his latest 'Chopper' collection. Gaster, one of the few designers to maintain a distinctive style throughout his career, offers a vision for the hard-edged urban woman who is not afraid to power-dress and his Blade Runner-esque models showed off the range to perfection. Photograph: Ben Ewes

Penguin plans to push Puffin out of £35m pecking order

Ian Burrell

It is apparently a trait of British food company marketing executives that when they look upon a white-chested seabird they immediately think: "chocolate biscuit".

A High Court judge listened yesterday as lawyers representing the Asda supermarket chain argued that its range of Puffin chocolate biscuits was not a copy of the 60-year-old Penguin brand. United Biscuits, which sells £35m worth of Penguins a year, is suing Asda for alleged trademark infringement and "passing off".

To even the most junior bird-fancier there would be little difficulty in telling the two creatures apart. Penguins are flightless *spheniscidae*, which propel themselves through water with their wings and nest on the ground in the Southern

Hemisphere. Puffins, by contrast, are *alcidae*, strong flyers which nest in cliffs in the Northern Hemisphere.

But lawyers for UB do not believe that ornithology is a popular pastime within the ranks of the chocolate biscuit-buying public. They argued yesterday that the existence of the two brands would cause great confusion. A succession of Liverpool shoppers testified that they had thought Puffins were made by the same company as Penguins. One, Pauline Bennett, explained that they were water birds beginning with "p" and ending with "n".

"What about a pigeon?" challenged Gordon Pollock, Asda's QC. UB's counsel, Michael Bloch, said there was "no inherent connection" between seabirds and chocolate bis-

cuits which could excuse the copying. The only connection was UB's particular distinctive product.

Asda had even adapted UB's slogan by urging consumers to "pick up a Puffin", complained Mr Bloch at the start of a 10-day hearing.

Asda insisted the names and the depiction of the bird character were very different. It contended that any similarities would be recognised by the public as simply a humorous reference by Asda to the famous Penguin and therefore would cause no confusion.

The court heard that packaging designers had been asked by the supermarket chain to come up with a brand-beater to rival the Penguin.

While they considered the suitability of a variety of birds as the symbol of the new biscuit, "P-pick up a guillemot" does not have appear to have even made it to the drawing-board.

The King's Road irregulars versus the jungle rebels

'Security firm' hired to end guerrilla war

Michael Ashworth

"I am sick and tired of our boys coming back in body-bags," said the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, Sir Julius Chan. So he called in the professionals from the King's Road, 9,000 miles away.

The PNG government has contracted Sandline International, a Bahamian-registered company with representative offices in London and Washington DC to assist it in its operations against rebels in the island of Bougainville who have been fighting a nine-year guerrilla war against the authorities.

They deny they are mercenaries. "We are an international military consultancy company specialising in the provision of advice and problem resolution for legitimate governments and international organisations," its Chief Executive Officer, Tim Spicer, told *The Independent* yesterday.

Col Spicer is a former lieutenant-colonel in the Scots Guards with 20 years' experience in the Falklands, Bosnia, Cyprus, the Gulf War and Northern Ireland, where he was appointed OBE. A brisk, crisp man, he was Michael Rose's military attaché in Bosnia, and knows how to handle the media. Sandline works out of a smart, premises on the King's Road with the latest technology and expensive modern art on the wall, more like the office of an management consultancy than a barracks.

Early last year, representatives of Sandline were approached by the PNG government to assist in advis-

ing and training their armed forces.

The contract was signed in January this year, and is reportedly worth \$36m. The PNG National Defence Force, despite the assistance provided by the Australian Armed Forces, has been unable to deal effectively with the Bougainville Revolutionary Army rebels. It has frequently been accused of human rights abuses and summary executions.

Sandline admits to being involved in PNG but would not discuss details of the operation stating that "our projects are generally sensitive in nature and we apply strict rules of confidentiality to our work and client relationships." However, Australian newspapers have reported that PNG planned to bring in up to 150 foreign-hired soldiers for an operation to capture or kill the leaders of the pro-independence Bougainville Revolutionary Army.

Sir Julius Chan said yesterday that "the team we have hired to train our Security Force members are not cowboys, they are a reputable professional company who are part of our many-faceted strategy to reach a lasting solution to this particular crisis, as well as other matters of national security."

Sandline considers itself and one or two other companies to be at the leading edge of a global trend in private security companies assisting nation states with their internal security problems. It calls upon the resources of a number of different specialist sub-contractors in Britain, the US and South Africa, and these include ex-members of the UK, US and South African special forces.



The precedents for the use of private security companies to tackle civil wars were set by the South Africa-based Executive Outcomes (EO) in Angola and Sierra Leone. Sandline emphatically denies that it is a subsidiary of EO, though it has "sub-contracted" some work in PNG to them, says Col Spicer. "We have a high regard for the professionalism of Executive Outcomes, but we are not the same company," he adds.

However, Sandline shares offices with companies whose directors include Tony Buckingham, the businessman who introduced EO into Angola, their first big contract.

Col Spicer says Sandline was established in the early 1990s in order "to fill a vacuum in the post-Cold War

era, to offer governments specialist military expertise at a time when Western nations' desire to provide active support to resolve overseas conflicts has materially decreased, as has their capability to do so."

It is an independent entity privately owned by senior ex-military personnel from the UK and US armed forces. The company is registered in Nassau, Bahamas.

Like its competitors, the US-based Military Personnel and Resources Incorporated and EO, it shies away from the label of mercenary. It claims that it will only accept projects that "receive the endorsement of the international community." To this end it declares that it has four operating principles. It will only undertake projects acceptable to key Western governments, such as the US and the UK. It will only undertake operations that are legal and moral. It works on behalf of internationally recognised government regimes. And operations must be conducted within the boundaries of client governments.

The employment of Sandline International has embarrassed the Australian government, which enjoys good relations with PNG and trains their Defence Force. During question time yesterday in the Australian Parliament, the Prime Minister stated: "We have no sympathy for the BRA which has carried out a great deal of violence and has constantly obstructed talks. But we are convinced that military action is not the answer, that only a negotiated settlement can offer a long-term solution."

Ragged rebellion, page 11

Tories will sell off Underground if they win poll

Colin Brown and Randeep Ramesh

John Major will take an election gamble today with the announcement that London Underground is to be privatised if the Tories are returned to office.

The go-ahead for the privatisation of the Tube, which carries millions of voters in the crucial South East, was sanctioned at a Downing Street strategy meeting of Cabinet ministers to approve the manifesto. It will be announced in the Commons today by Sir George Young, the Secretary of State for Transport, although the plan alarmed some ministers earlier this month when it was first approved at the Chequers Cabinet on the draft election manifesto.

The announcement was delayed by a damaging and embarrassing leak, but Sir George persuaded colleagues to go ahead with the plan on the grounds that the Tube needs investment, and it can only get it if it is put in private hands. Labour believes it is a gift-edged gift for its own election campaign against the "fat cats" who have profited from other privatisations. The Underground would carry with it some highly lucrative real estate in the capital, and the leaked document suggested it could be sold off at a knock-down price.

The statement in the Commons today will mark clear differences between the two parties. John Prescott, the deputy leader of the Labour Party, said last night that the Government had adopted the "Prescott formula" for keeping the Post Office in public hands, while allowing it

to raise private finance. "It shows that they are privatising the Tube system out of pure political spite," he said.

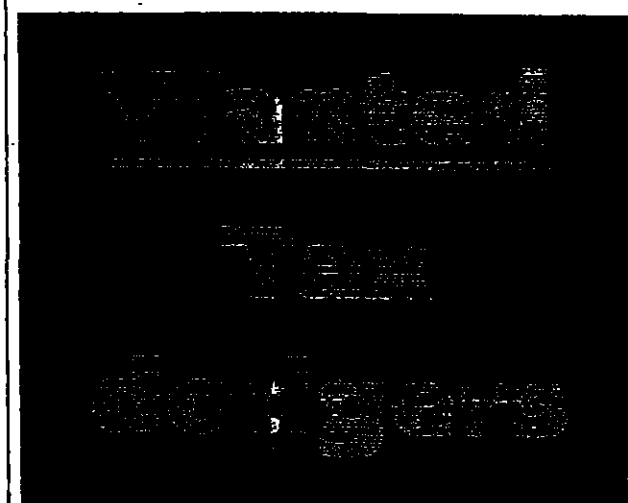
Andrew Smith, shadow transport secretary, said Labour would build partnerships with private firms to raise investment for the Tube, as well as retaining public control over the system. He attacked the Tory plan as a "nightmare vision" for a fifth term, which could lead to closures of stations in the outer London suburbs.

The leaked Cabinet memo to the Prime Minister by Sir George said: "The Underground will be a unique and very difficult privatisation to sell to the public."

Although the details of the sell-off have yet to be finalised, Downing Street favours a model which would see a single body regulating levels of service and fares and then franchise groups of lines. Another scheme, which would have floated London Underground on the stock market and given shares to commuters, was quickly shelved after criticisms that it would have created a "private monopoly".

The Cabinet committee meeting yesterday approved the final draft of the Tory manifesto, including more parental choice in schools, an expansion of Workstart in which those on the dole will have to work for their benefits, and a switch to more self-provision in welfare through insurance. Kenneth Clarke, the Chancellor, will today return to the attack on Labour over tax with alleged new Treasury calculations, which he claims will mean higher taxes under a Labour government, a charge Labour denies.

Comment: Donald Macdintyre, page 15



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QUICKLY

Bridgewater ethics
The chief constable of the police force whose officers fabricated evidence in the Bridgewater case said that, at that time, ethics were not considered important. **Page 4**

Starvation warning
Dementia sufferers are being left to starve in NHS hospitals and care homes by staff who do not understand their condition, the Alzheimer's Disease Society has warned. **Page 7**

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هَذَا مِنْ أَصْلٍ

news

significant shorts

Havoc threat to the South from worst storm in years

Southern Britain was bracing itself for the worst storms for seven years as darkness fell last night. Weather forecasters warned of damage from severe storms racing in from the Atlantic bringing 90mph winds. Tidal warnings for the south-west coasts were issued by the Environment Agency. "Amber" warnings of waves crashing over sea walls and beaches were issued for north Cornwall, north Devon and Chesil Bank in south Dorset.

The Meteorological Office said Britain was going through the most sustained period of strong winds since January and February 1990. It predicted driving rain and winds of only 10mph less than the hurricane force winds of 1987 in some areas. Most of southern Britain as far north as Bristol was due to be hit by the storms, according to a Met Office spokesman, Andy Yeatman. "It's always difficult to say how much damage will be done but building damage might not be quite as bad as in 1990," said Mr Yeatman.

Mrs Howard denies jail comment

The wife of Home Secretary Michael Howard yesterday instructed her lawyer to write to Granada TV, two newspapers, publisher Penguin, and former the Prison Service chief Derek Lewis, denying claims that she had urged her husband to cut the nutritional content of food served to Britain's prisoners. Granada TV's *World in Action*, screened last night, contained an interview with Mr Lewis in which he made the allegations about Sandra Howard, the model Sandra Paul. John Turnbull, of Linklaters & Paines, said: "She never said or suggested that any actual or proposed nutritional standards at Her Majesty's Prisons were too generous. Mr Lewis has told *World in Action* that he was taken aside by Mr Howard's political adviser, David Cameron, in 1994 and told that Mrs Howard believed that 'the prison code's requirements to provide a balanced and nutritious diet was somehow too generous for prisoners'."

Secret reburial for Moors victim



The body of Moors murder victim Lesley Ann Downey has been exhumed and reburied after a series of attacks on her grave, her mother revealed yesterday. Ann West, 67, asked for special permission to move her daughter from the Southern Cemetery in Manchester last year after vandals struck for a third time. Graffiti calling for killer Myra Hindley to be freed from jail was daubed on the marble headstone in August on what would have been Lesley Ann's birthday. Lesley Ann was

reburied in a private ceremony in a new, secret grave.

Hunt for student's killer goes cold

Detectives hunting the killer of A-level student Nicola Dixon have carried out DNA tests on 20 men from the Sutton Coldfield area but have failed to find a match for the profile obtained from substances left at the murder scene. Police are anxious to speak to a man seen running down Trinity Hill at around 10.25pm on the night of the murder who was wearing a purple tracksuit with a stripe down the side, and is described as white, aged 19-25. They also want to speak to the driver of a Ford Fiesta car seen in the area, described as white, aged 20-25, with short fair hair.

Thais suspect man killed himself

A British man whose body was found tied to a pier in Thailand may have committed suicide, it emerged yesterday. Geoffrey Chapman, 54, was found strapped to a pole on a pier at Sri Racha beach, 95 miles southeast of Bangkok, at low tide on Sunday. It was initially thought that Mr Chapman, who was originally from Scarborough, North Yorkshire, could have been murdered. But Thai police said today there were no signs of a struggle, although Mr Chapman is thought to have been weighed down by a rock tied around his legs.

Waste scheme goes down drain

One of Britain's biggest plastics recycling schemes is folding at the end of this week with the organisers blaming the Government. The scheme recovered more than 8,000 tonnes of used polythene film from Britain's farms over two years. But the 18 rival manufacturing companies who joined to run it are bailing collections and farmers will have to go back to treating polythene as waste. The 18 lost business to two other firms who refused to join the scheme and were able to sell their polythene cheaper. The Government is blamed for not bringing in regulations to penalise "free riders" who undermine recycling schemes.

Bloody Sunday review delayed

The discovery of possible new evidence about the Bloody Sunday killings led to the withdrawal yesterday of a court action for judicial review. A request to take the case out of the Belfast High Court list for tomorrow was made by lawyers for a sister of one of the victims. No reason was given in court but afterwards solicitor Angela Ritchie said information had been received "which may ultimately result in receipt by us of important new evidence". It was understood that she was referring to two recent television programmes which appeared to confirm claims that soldiers, other than paratroopers, were shooting from Londonderry walls when 14 people were killed on January 30 1972.

Four jailed for drugs smuggling plot

Four men, including one described by the judge as a "bent copper", were jailed for a total of 41 years for a £2m drugs smuggling plot. The four appearing at Canterbury Crown Court were Kenneth Harris, 43, of Welling; David Ng, 37, of Winchester Road, London; John Illingworth, 39, of Greenwich, and serving Metropolitan policeman Ronald Palumbo, 31, of Chingford, Essex. Harris was jailed for 12 years, Ng and Palumbo for 10 and Illingworth for nine years. The court heard cannabis with a street value of more than £15m was found concealed in a trailer of a lorry owned by Harris. The lorry was stopped at Dover in November 1995.

Mother threw her baby off bridge

A schizophrenic woman who killed her 16-week-old son by throwing him off a river bridge was ordered to be detained in hospital indefinitely. Lisa Whayman, 33, of Wordingworth, Suffolk, threw baby Daniel off the Orwell Bridge near Ipswich in August last year, Norwich Crown Court was told. Whayman denied murder but admitted manslaughter. Her plea was accepted by the prosecution. The judge ordered that she be detained at a psychiatric hospital until mental health authorities deemed her fit to resume a normal life.

people



Larry Flynt, playing a judge in the award-winning film about his life

Life of Larry turns to gold as Church attacks sacrilege

A film about the life of Larry Flynt, the notorious US publisher, won the Berlin Film Festival's top award - the Golden Bear - yesterday, edging aside *The English Patient*. The two are expected to be competing for the top honours in the Oscars.

The People v Larry Flynt, made by Miles Forman, the Oscar-winning director of *Amadeus* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, depicts the tumultuous career of Flynt, a school drop-out who ran strip clubs in Ohio before launching his successful porn magazine, *Hustler* in 1973.

While a cameo appearance by Flynt himself (ironically playing a member of the legal establishment with which he found himself in conflict), the film has sparked massive controversy in the US and elsewhere, notably over the promotional posters. These show Woody Harrelson, who plays Flynt, wearing a stars-and-stripes loincloth, with his arms outstretched as if crucified, superimposed on the groin of a bikini-clad woman.

Yesterday Forman ordered the removal of the posters in France, where they had prompted the Catholic Church to bring a lawsuit. Magali Thorne, a lawyer for Columbia Pictures, told the French court of appeals that the posters would be removed "in the spirit of appeasement and to cut short" any efforts by opponents to profit from the controversy.

The president of the Conference of Bishops of France, Monsignor Louis-Marie Billé, said it was unacceptable to compare Christ's crucifixion with the ordeal of "a pornographer", referring to Flynt. The poster had already been rejected by the Motion Picture Association of America, and in Australia and Switzerland the Catholic Church branded it offensive and sacrilegious.

However, despite missing out on the top honour at Berlin, *The English Patient* did not go unrewarded. Juliet Binoche was named best actress for her role in the film, which won 12 Oscar nominations. Best actor went to Leonardo di Caprio, for his leading role in *Romeo and Juliet* and the Silver Bear was awarded to the Taiwanese film *He Liu*, which means the river.

[The 12 Oscar nominations for *The English Patient* have boosted US sales of Michael Ondaatje's Booker Prize-winning novel on which it is based by 400 per cent. The American edition has now sold 600,000 copies and the British opening of the film on 14 March will coincide with a concerted campaign to market tie-in editions of the book by Macmillan, the parent company of Ondaatje's publisher, Picador.

Canny publishers have always profited from tie-in editions of books adapted for film and TV. The recent spate of Jane Austen dramatisations spawned new paperback versions of the novels with costumed stars on their covers. Penguin, with its vast backlist, usually does best with "classic" adaptations. Jane Campion's new film of Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* has inspired a Penguin reprint complete with 8 pages of colour photos of its stars, including Nicole Kidman, John Malkovich and Richard E Grant. And Oxford recently persuaded Kenneth Branagh to approve the use of a still from his film on its paperback edition of *Hamlet*. He requested no fee, but he did ask for a complete set of Oxford's World's Classics. Boyd Tonkin

Tunnel visionary to give lift to Manchester runway protest

The environmental activist Swampy (right) is to lend his tunnel-digging expertise to protesters against the planned second runway at Manchester Airport.

The 23-year-old, whose real name is Daniel Needs, made headlines last month when he spent seven days underground holding up work on the A90 road near Honiton, Devon.

Protesters at Manchester Airport claim to have already dug between three and four tunnels in woodland at the end of the existing runway, two of which have activists sleeping in them. They hope to delay and even prevent the proposed £172m second runway, although details of the fortified tunnels already built are being kept secret for tactical reasons.

Melanie, 27, a demonstrator from Manchester, said: "We have heard Swampy is on his way. We are looking forward to his support. Obviously he has experience which can help us and it will help with the publicity, because he is already so famous."

About 40 people are taking part in the protest, which is continuing despite warnings by police that methane in the ground is putting the demonstrators' lives at risk. A spokesman for Manchester Airport declined to comment.

Meanwhile, the former Beirut hostage Terry Waite gave the anti-



runway protesters a boost by offering his support for their cause.

Mr Waite, who was born in near-by Styal, visited the demonstrators' camp and signed a green-skies document protesting about the environmental impact of the air-transport industry.

But Mr Waite refused to back illegal tactics adopted by some environmental protesters. "These people are taking direct action and have the support of some very respectable groups and associations," he said.

"I myself would not break the law. I would not do that. That is down to the individual conscience." Mr Waite gave evidence at the 101-day public inquiry 18 months ago opposing the runway but the inspector ruled against the protesters.

MP presses for remembrance at slave wreck site

The Labour MP Bernie Grant yesterday said that he would visit the excavation site on the Devon coast which contains the mass grave of shipwrecked slaves.

As many as 60 people are thought to have perished when the treasure ship *London* went down near Rapparee Cove, Itraconne, nearly 200 years ago. Skull bones, confirmed as being of African descent, have been uncovered during the last three weeks by storms and the work of local archaeologists.

A spokeswoman for Mr Grant said he was deeply upset by the discovery and would be visiting the area on Sunday to pay his respects.

"He is trying to ensure the grave be treated with all due reverence, and has spoken to the director of the Itraconne museum, who shares the same view," she said. "The site is part of a renaissance of black history and will be of interest to a large number of people. It will become a place of remembrance."

She added the site is as important to the young black community as the Tower of London, for example, is for white people. It is believed the area could also hold the African Reparation Movement's annual ceremony, which Mr Grant founded, to commemorate those who have died during slavery.

briefing

BUSINESS

More directors disqualified since accounting reform

The number of directors banned or disqualified from running limited companies shot up by nearly 50 per cent in 1996, according to figures released yesterday by the Department of Trade and Industry. Last year, 946 directors were disqualified as unfit, up from 633 in 1995, while actions were started against 1,376 - 20 per cent more than the year before.

Of those, 273 were banned by the courts from running companies for a range of offences, including embezzlement and dishonest accounting. Commenting on the disqualification figures, John Taylor, the DTI's corporate and consumer affairs minister, said: "High standards are essential to sustain the confidence of suppliers, creditors, employees, and investors."

He said the rise in disqualifications was partly due to new reporting standards introduced last September which make it easier for insolvency accountants to identify and report misconduct.

News of the increase came as the DTI confirmed it would be attempting to disqualify 10 directors of Barings, the investment bank which lost more than £800m through the actions of the rogue trader, Nick Leeson.

HEALTH

Over-50s are couch potatoes

The North West has the biggest number of couch potatoes among people over 50, while people in East Anglia are the most active in England, according to new research from the Health Education Authority.

The study of 4,300 people between 50 and 74 found that nationally, more than seven out of 10 men and eight out of 10 women over 50 did not take part in sufficient activity to benefit their health. Instead, they turned on the TV, with women watching an average of 21 hours and men an average of 19 hours of television per week.

Once they had switched off the TV, a quarter of older women (aged 70-74) did not have enough strength in their legs to get out of a chair without using their arms. And over a third of women and nearly one in 10 men aged 50-74 were unable to walk at a 20 minute-a-mile pace.

Glenda Cooper



LOTTERY

Grants criticised as too high-brow

Local communities feel left out by National Lottery funding and think high-brow arts projects are getting too large a share of the pot, according to a survey published today. Two in three people believe too much money goes towards projects which only benefit wealthy art lovers.

The NOP study also revealed a belief that funding is biased towards cities rather than rural areas, and that people from the north think too much money is spent in the south.

Eighty-four per cent believe charity should begin nearer to home and more lottery cash should find its way into local community projects. And more than three quarters think they should have more say in where the money goes.

Two-thirds of people, questioned in the survey for the Somerset supermarket chain, expressed disapproval over the Royal Opera House receiving lottery money.

While 85 per cent felt raising money for charities through the lottery was a good thing, 70 per cent were baffled by the criteria used to select recipients, and a similar majority wanted a greater say in which organisations received money.

MEDIA

Friends top TV ratings for teens

Friends, the cult US sitcom series, is the most popular programme among 13- to 16-year-olds, with 57 per cent voting it among their favourite shows. *Eastenders*, *X-Files*, *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* are also big hits with this teenage group. These are among the latest findings by Media 2000, a research project which tracks the changing tastes and attitudes of London schoolchildren.

Two-thirds of the sample said they would like to see more music and comedy on TV. The same high proportion have a TV in their bedroom. The favourite advertisement among these young teenagers - who watch nearly four and a half hours of TV every day, on average - is the controversial Blackcurrant Tango commercial. Media 2000 was devised and conducted by Andy Hearnshaw and Nigel of BBJ Media Services and is analysed by Rob Brown.

EDUCATION

GCSE retakes are often wasted

The vast majority of school-leavers who turn to further education colleges to retake GCSEs still fail to achieve even four exam passes on their second attempt, new figures reveal. A report on GCSE courses in sixth form and general FE colleges suggests that, for many students, retakes do no more than reinforce a sense of failure and decrease motivation.

The study, by the colleges' inspection body, uncovers a high drop-out rate on retake courses, as well as poor results and low attendance. In 1994-5, the latest year for which figures are available, fewer than one in ten 16-19-year-old students attempting five GCSE retakes passed them all, and more than a fifth passed none at all.

The inspectors say taking general vocational qualifications instead of re-attempting GCSEs may hold the key to breaking the pattern of failure.

Lucy Ward



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Research casts doubt on cot death theory

Glenda Cooper
Social Affairs Correspondent

Antimony, the substance which has been blamed for causing cot deaths, has been found to be so common it can be measured in house dust.

The findings call into question the theory which caused near panic among parents when it was publicised on the ITV programme *The Cook Report* in 1994.

Antimony is used as a fire retardant in mattresses, and the research scientist Barry Richardson claims that the combination of a fungus in mattresses and urine and perspiration from the baby can combine with antimony to form a lethal gas. After the programme, Boots and other retailers withdrew mattresses from sale and

thousands of parents contacted a phone-line.

Crucial to Mr Richardson's theory was the idea that antimony is found in mattresses but rarely encountered anywhere else.

But Mike Thompson, reader in analytic chemistry at Birbeck College, University of London said antimony found in babies does not necessarily come from mattresses.

He added that he was "very surprised" at the levels of antimony he discovered. When dust samples were taken from 100 homes at random around Britain, antimony was found in house dust at between 10 and 20 parts per million, compared with rocks and soil where it is found in 0.5 parts per million.

Joyce Epstein, general secretary of the Foundation for the

Study of Infant Deaths, which funded the research, said yesterday: "Richardson claims the only way babies can absorb antimony is through mattresses. We have found that antimony is everywhere around you, in ordinary household dust as well as lots of other places. The corollary of that is there is no evidence, first, that antimony causes cot deaths or, second, that there is a problem with mattresses... even if antimony was a problem, you cannot finger mattresses as being the only source."

Mr Richardson, now based in Guernsey said: "It is interesting they are doing research on antimony which means they must think it is significant. Previously the problem was that no-one would say it is relevant."

Later this week Penguin will also publish a book called *The Cot Death Cover Up?* by the New Zealand forensic scientist Jim Sprott, which also claims that antimony and phosphorus are behind unexplained infant deaths.

Cot deaths have fallen from 912 in 1991 to the current rate of between 300 and 400 a year. The lowering of the cot death rate is thought to be due to the "Back to Sleep" campaign launched in December 1991.

The campaign advised parents not to let babies sleep on their stomachs, not to let them become too hot or cold, and to keep them away from cigarette smoke. A survey in 1995 revealed that a baby whose mother and father smokes is five times more likely to be a cot death victim than one in a non-smoking home.

The number of cot deaths in the Irish Republic shot up by 23 per cent last year after decreasing by 70 per cent in a previous five-year period, according to new figures.

The rise in fatalities has still to be fully analysed, but Tom Matthews, professor of paediatrics at University College, Dublin said the deaths were being associated with one or both parents smoking and with social deprivation.

GPs report more meningitis cases

Recent meningitis scares have led to an increase of almost a fifth in the number of acute meningitis cases notified for England and Wales, writes Glenda Cooper.

But this has not translated into cases confirmed in the laboratory, the Public Health Laboratory Service said yesterday, putting the increase down to greater awareness among doctors of the dangers of the disease.

Acute notified cases reached 2,700 in 1996 compared with 2,300 in 1995 - an increase of around 17 per cent.

The National Meningitis Trust said it was disappointed with the "moderate increase" particularly as the number of notified cases had been below 2,000 in 1994.

"Much of the decrease in cases between 1992 and 1994 was due to the success of the Hib vaccine for the under-fours which was introduced in 1992," said Ray Thompson of the trust.

"The effects of this have now worked through the figures - all of which serves to illustrate the vital importance of vaccine development."

"The trust has always given priority to the search for vaccines in its funding policy and continues to rely on the generosity of the public, and increasingly industry and commerce, to keep its selected research projects up to speed."

But a spokeswoman for the Public Health Laboratory Service said that the increase in cases could actually be a good sign because it meant that doctors were becoming more aware of the symptoms of meningitis.

Meningitis is a "notifiable" disease whereby doctors have a statutory duty to alert the local authority when cases occur.

The number of cases confirmed by the laboratory between 1 July 1995 and 4 February 1996 was 998 but this dropped to 953 between 1 July 1996 and 4 February 1997.



The Spice Girls: Nominated for the Best Group award

Outstanding: The Bee Gees Photograph: Big Pictures

Comedian holds court at the Brits

The success of the Brits ceremony, the biggest annual music awards, last night rested on the fast-talking comedian Ben Elton to keep the audience amused at Earl's Court in west London.

Choosing the host has been fraught with difficulty ever since a notorious performance of fluffed lines by Mick Fleetwood and Samantha Fox. The Fleetwood Mac drummer Mick - six-and-a-half foot tall - and the diminutive model and pop singer could hardly fit in the same close-up, let alone manage a seamless witty presentation. That year - 1989 - marked a low point for the show, which became a laughing stock.

The past two years have seen frenetic former Radio 1 disc jockey Chris Evans doing the honours, with rather more professionalism than most of his predecessors. But after last year's sensational stage invasion by pop star Jarvis Cocker, Evans announced that he would not host the Brits again.

So, this year it is Ben Elton's turn. The former *Saturday Night Live* compere has matured into a successful novelist and behind-the-scenes scriptwriter of *The Thin Blue Line*. He is now 37 and almost respectable. He has

attacked Hollywood's culture of violence in his latest book *Pyromaniac*. But he is still just dangerous enough to hold the respect of the pop audience.

And since the ceremony was not shown live, Brit producers knew that they could edit any dubious gags before today's television screening.

The Bee Gees were named winners of the Outstanding Contribution to the British Music Industry award ahead of the ceremony, but among the nominations were George Michael, Mark Morrison, Simply Red, Sting, and Tricky as best male solo artist. Contenders for best female solo artist were Dina Carroll, Gabrielle, Donna Lewis, Louise, Eddi Reader, and for best group, Kula Shaker, Lightning Seeds, Manic Street Preachers, Spice Girls.

Best album nominees: *K* by Kula Shaker, *Ocean Drive* by Lighthouse Family, *Everything Must Go* by Manic Street Preachers, *Older* by George Michael, and *Moseley Shoals* by Ocean Colour Scene. Oasis won this category last year with *(What's The Story) Morning Glory?* This year The Manics have triumphed in every other poll, and should do here, too.

Billie-Jo's foster father questioned over her death

Jason Bennetto
Crime Correspondent

The foster father of Billie-Jo Jenkins, the 13-year-old girl who was found beaten to death at her home 11 days ago, was being questioned last night in connection with her killing.

Sion Jenkins, 39, a deputy headmaster, was arrested early in the morning by police in Hastings, East Sussex.

Billie-Jo died after being battered over the head with a 18in metal tent spike as she painted the patio doors in the back garden of her home in Hastings.

Mr Jenkins and his wife, Lois, held a press conference shortly after the killing on 15 February at which they said that their 10-year-old daughter was the first to discover the body of Billie-Jo. Mr Jenkins had returned home with two of his four natural daughters from music lessons after leaving Billie-Jo alone for 40 minutes, the conference was told.



Left, Sion Jenkins, 39, legal guardian of Billie-Jo, 13



Mr and Mrs Jenkins, who last December assumed legal guardianship of Billie-Jo after fostering her for four years, said that they were devastated at the loss of their daughter.

The couple said they had been plagued by prowlers and

nuisance telephone calls and had felt a "sense of unease" since January. Mr Jenkins said: "We moved to the house because of the park and because of the children. But January has been a very strange and uneasy month. As a family, we have felt un-

easy about prowlers. On one occasion I was looking out of the back window and I thought I saw movement. I switched on the outside security light and got a fleeting glimpse of somebody moving about. Another time I saw somebody in the park staring at the house."

Mrs Jenkins, 35, a social services project manager in east London, said: "We had decided to move house because of the problems in the area."

The couple did not contact the police about the recent prowlers and telephone calls.

Mr Jenkins was being questioned by detectives at Hastings police station last night. He is the third man to be arrested. A 36-year-old man was released after questioning and a 44-year-old local man was released into secure psychiatric care.

A spokesman for Sussex Police said yesterday: "A local man in his thirties was arrested this morning and was helping with inquiries."

Duke joins forces with 'Viz' founder to recreate the golden age of steam

David Garfinkel

One of the strangest alliances in railway history occurred yesterday as Chris Donald, creator of the anarchic adult comic *Viz*, joined forces with the Duke of Northumberland in an attempt to recreate the golden age of steam train travel.

Mr Donald, who is responsible for bringing the likes of Johnny Rotten and the Fat Slags to Britain's news-stands, fulfilled a life-long ambition when he unveiled the £5m dream for a three-mile "castle-to-coast" service from Alnwick to Alnmouth. It is hoped the Aln Valley railway will run trains throughout the summer, and the trust backing the project believes it would generate £1.5m a year for the local economy.

Mr Donald, a railway fanatic who admitted that if he won the lottery he would buy his own

steam line, has already contributed to the launch by donating an engine worth £15,000. He already owns three former train stations and lives



Chris Donald with a steam engine Photograph: Stuart Outerside

in a converted one in Akeld, Northumberland. He said: "I am a buff, but I have always been particularly interested in preserving the lines around

Northumberland. At first I was very cynical, but when the idea was explained to me it seemed fairly sensible. As the father of two young children who read *Thomas the Tank Engine* books I am always being pestered to take them for a ride on a steam train. It's every trainpotter's dream to open up an old branch line and run a steam line."

And on the question of whether this venture would result in a new *Viz* hero, he said there was always a chance: "The characters in the comic tend to be people you meet, and I have met a myriad of disgusting trainpotter types, which all helps with source material."

More than 100 corporate heads and business leaders were invited to Alnwick Castle to see the plans for themselves as the trust courts would-be financial backers. The duke himself has accepted the role of president.

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news

Nursery schools plea for £50m

Lucy Ward
Education Correspondent

An extra £50m investment in nursery education is needed next year to give all children the chance of high-quality pre-schooling, campaigners said yesterday.

The Pre-School Learning Alliance said the money would ensure wider access to nursery schools, including free places for 27,000 three-year-olds from poorer homes.

It would also pay for 250 new nursery schools, more training for staff and courses for 15,000 parents in child development and parenting.

The PLA set out its demands as part of a 10-point manifesto for improving nursery education directed at the government taking power after the general election. Though the organisation insisted it was not attempting to influence parents' voting intentions, it renewed its attack on the effects of nursery vouchers, due to be introduced nationally on 1 April.

Campaigners claim vouchers, which have been piloted in four local authority areas for the past year, will cause the closure of up to 800 playgroups around the country as schools rush to bring four-year-olds into reception classes.

The PLA claims rural areas including Devon, Sussex and Worcestershire will be worst hit, as numbers of under-fives will be too low to support a range of pre-school provision. It says thousands of three-year-olds, who are not eligible for vouchers, will be left with no chance of a pre-school place if voluntary-sector playgroups close.

In its "10 steps" for nursery education, the PLA calls on the Government to intervene, using legislation if necessary, to stop primary schools "putting undue pressure on parents" to send four-year-olds to reception classes.

Though ministers have asked schools not to do so, the free market thinking behind vouchers means they are unlikely to impose any regulation.

Labour has pledged to abolish the voucher scheme if elected, but will honour vouchers already issued.



Family and friends watch as the body of IRA victim, Lance Bombardier Stephen Restorick, is carried into Peterborough Crematorium yesterday

Photograph: Brian Harris

IRA gun victim buried on birthday

The IRA murder of a young soldier should act as a "catalyst to restart the peace process", his funeral was told yesterday.

Lance Bombardier Stephen Restorick, of the 3rd Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery, who was shot dead by a sniper at an Army checkpoint in South Armagh, was buried on the day of his 24th birthday.

The service, at Peterborough Crematorium, Cambridgeshire, was attended by the local MP and Conservative Party chairman, Brian Mawhinney, and the Irish Ambassador to London, Edward Barrington.

Two Ulster Unionist councillors and more than 200 members of his family, friends and colleagues were also there to bid farewell to the young soldier. Well-wishers outside listened on loudspeakers as a Humanist minister, John Pearce, said his death had touched the hearts of many people in all parts of the British Isles. "We have to hope that his death will be a catalyst to restart the peace process and bring both sides together to talk," Mr Pearce said.

The soldier, whose family live in Peterborough, died on 12 February, during his second tour of duty in Northern Ireland, from a single shot which narrowly missed his bulletproof vest.

Marjorie Mowlin, page 15

Police chief admits faults of Seventies

Jason Bennetto
Crime Correspondent

The chief constable of the police force whose officers are accused of fabricating a confession in the Bridgewater case admitted yesterday that at the time of the investigation ethics were not considered important.

Edward Crew, Chief Constable of the West Midlands Police, said: "Back in the Seventies, we would arrest somebody, we would interrogate them and then we might believe they had other evidence if they didn't admit it."

Michael Hickey, Vincent

Hickey and James Robinson were released on bail on Friday pending a full appeal hearing, after the High Court heard that the West Midlands force had used a forged confession to secure evidence, which led to the conviction of the Bridgewater Four.

The three men served 18 years for the murder of newspaper boy Carl Bridgewater. A fourth man, Patrick Molloy, who was also jailed, died in custody in 1981.

The Chief Constable's comments have angered the Bridgewater campaigners who have accused him of trying to justify past wrongdoing.

Mr Crew, who at the time of the Bridgewater case was serving as an officer in the Metropolitan Police, said that as an officer working in the late Seventies he could not recall "words like ethics and ethical behaviour" being used in the police.

"They weren't actually important to us."

"We can't go on like that, and quite simply we have moved away from that, from those sorts of ways of doing business."

"I have to say that if the penalty we pay is that guilty people walk away and don't get convicted, and I suspect there are many of those, that

is a price worth paying. "There are never any circumstances, and I have never believed there have been, in which one can justify locking up an innocent person."

He was asked in an interview if interrogations in the Seventies could ever get "rough". He replied: "Of course they could."

But he added: "Even in those days there was never, ever, an expectation that police officers would break the law - the substantial change has come about in the culture in which we work."

"Since the Bridgewater case there have been important changes in the law, such as the

Police and Criminal Evidence Act (Pace). This insists that interrogated suspects be allowed a solicitor and the recording of police interviews, and on the creation of an independent Crown Prosecution Service."

The Chief Constable said if any of his officers had committed a criminal offence during the Carl Bridgewater case they would be brought before the courts. Merseyside police are investigating the case and a report is likely to go to the CPS.

Ann Whelan, the mother of Michael Hickey, said yesterday that despite the Chief Constable's assurances of a full investigation she still feared that they

would try to ignore evidence of police corruption as it had happened so long ago.

"They still have to put things right. They can't say just because there weren't any safeguards then, 'We can ignore it'."

"What they are saying is, 'Well until the safeguards came in we could do as we like'."

West Midlands press office yesterday said that Mr Crew's comments had been taken out of context.

The solicitors for retired Detective Constable Graham Leake, whom the High Court was told by defence QC had almost certainly written a false confession in the Bridgewater

case, and other unnamed officers, yesterday issued a statement denying "any improper practice". The former detective, the statement said, had been subjected to a campaign of harassment and vilification. It continued: "It is not uncommon for alleged 'miscarriages of justice' to engender severe criticism of the conduct of police officers during which allegations are treated as proven facts, but when charges are later brought it is found that these widely reported allegations are not supported by evidence."

The other officer involved, Detective Constable John Perkins, has since died.

Video use may be increased

The police are considering expanding the use of video recordings of interviews with suspects which can later be presented in court, writes Jason Bennetto.

Video taping of cases involving serious crimes may become routine under the proposals being examined by a Home Office working party.

The move is aimed at preventing police using violence or intimidation to obtain confessions, such as in the Bridgewater case where three men were released from prison after serving 18 years for a murder they did not commit. Police chiefs believe it will also help counter false allegations against officers.

Four police forces in England

and Wales - Kent, the Metropolitan Police, West Mercia and the West Midlands - and forces in Scotland, have carried out a number of pilot projects using video. Cameras have also been fitted in some police stations and prisoner transport vans in London.

All police interviews are tape recorded at the moment, but suspects sometimes claim that officers were silently making threatening gestures.

David Maclean, a Home Office minister, commenting on the use of video recordings, said: "It's not done routinely... we've got to look in England at how it could be used in court to proper cases." The police have been

running technical studies into the idea for the last 18 months, Mr Maclean told BBC Radio 4's Today programme. Pilot schemes involving the Crown Prosecution Service and the Lord Chancellor's Department are now expected to go ahead in seven or eight areas.

"It could be the case in future that we want to video record all interviews, just the same as they do a tape recording now," he said. A suspect could object to the video being shown, but the judge would make the final decision.

Nigel Pascoe QC, chairman of the Bar Council's public affairs committee, who has used a video in one trial, welcomed the development as a "safeguard for a

defendant in custody". However, he warned it would be expensive to introduce video taping nationwide. David Phillips, secretary of the Association of Chief Police Officers' crime committee and the Chief Constable of Kent, added: "We believe video recording would [give] courts the chance to see not just what was said, but the way in which it was said, or silence exercised."

But Jim Nichol, solicitor for the Bridgewater Three, opposed the move, saying it could lead to experienced police officers using suspects' body language to implicate them.

Andreas Whitman Smith, page 15

Teenager 'first link' in Betts ecstasy chain

A teenager went on trial yesterday for the second time accused of being involved in supplying an ecstasy pill to Leah Betts.

Miss Betts died at her parents' home in Letchington, Essex, while celebrating her 18th birthday 14 months ago after taking a single ecstasy tablet.

A jury at Norwich Crown Court was yesterday told that Steven Packman, 19, of Laindon, Essex, was the first link in a chain of supply.

Mr Packman denies being concerned with the supply of ecstasy to Miss Betts and her friend, Sarah Cargill.

The jury was told that a previous trial, in December, was abandoned after the jury failed to reach any conclusion.

Andrew Williams, for the prosecution, said that Miss Betts and Miss Cargill wanted ecstasy for Leah's party. He said they had obtained four tablets through a chain of friends.

Outlining the chain of supply, he told the court that: Miss Cargill had asked a friend called Louise Yexley to help obtain the drugs. Miss Yexley had asked her boyfriend, Stephen Smith, 19, to buy the drugs when he visited a nightclub in Basildon, Essex, called Raquel's.

However, Mr Smith had not

been approached by a dealer at the club so Mr Packman then offered to ask a dealer and had returned with four ecstasy tablets.

Mr Williams told the court that Mr Smith had already admitted being concerned in the supply of ecstasy to Miss Betts and Miss Cargill and had been given a conditional discharge.

Mr Williams told the jury that Packman had confessed his role in the supply chain to a doorman at Raquel's nightclub - Bernie King.

Their conversation had been taped by the News Of The World newspaper.

Mr Williams also said that Mr Smith - Mr Packman's best friend - had also named Mr Packman as the man who bought the drugs. "He (Mr Packman) alone met the drug dealer who supplied this drug," said Mr Williams. "He (Mr Packman) alone, if he so wishes, is in a position to name that drug dealer."

But Mr Williams stressed to the jury that Mr Packman was not accused of any "criminal culpability" in Miss Betts' death.

He said Miss Betts had taken a pure ecstasy tablet and her death appeared to be the result of a "freakish chance". The trial continues.

DAILY POEM

Anagrams are People

By John Powell Ward

anagrams are people
a lemon rapes a grape

every leaf to come
a cemetery of love

whom Nelson Mandela won
one man who mends all now

o he entered dark Africa
oh dear friend take care

the ice-caps all melteth
the place calls the time

what is this our life?
this is for us awhile?

zones all wider, green fields
wells fade, lean origins end

This poem comes from John Powell Ward's fourth collection, *Genesis* (Seren). A former editor of *Poetry Wales* and lecturer at Swansea University, he has also written critical works on R.S. Thomas and Wordsworth. *Genesis* costs £5.95 from Seren at: First Floor, 2 Wyndham Street, Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan CF31 1ER.

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IRA gun victim buried on birthday

The IRA murder of a young man should act as a 'wake up call' to the peace process, a senior Republican official has said. He said the killing of the 21-year-old John P. O'Connell, who was shot dead by a sniper's bullet, was a 'wake up call' to the peace process. The official, who is a senior member of the IRA, said that the killing of O'Connell, who was shot dead by a sniper's bullet, was a 'wake up call' to the peace process. The official, who is a senior member of the IRA, said that the killing of O'Connell, who was shot dead by a sniper's bullet, was a 'wake up call' to the peace process.

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DAILY POEM

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THE WRONG DOG.**



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On show: Reni's *A Sibyl* Photograph: Denis Mahon Collection

Crowning moment for cognoscente of Italian Baroque

Marianne Macdonald
Arts Correspondent

An impressive example of the work of the artist Annibale Carracci, the most gifted of the Italian family of painters, opens to the public at the National Gallery tomorrow.

The Coronation of the Virgin, one of Carracci's most serene and classical paintings, goes on show in the Sainsbury Wing as part of the "Discovering the Italian Baroque" exhibition, drawn from the collection of Sir Denis Mahon, the art historian and collector who recently announced that 61 of his art works would go to museums and galleries in the United Kingdom after his death.

The exhibition of 79 paintings and 30 drawings continues until 18 May and includes works by Reni, Poussin, Domenichino, and Guercino. Three paintings



which were sold in the 1970s - including *The Coronation of the Virgin* - have been lent to the National Gallery for the show. The Mahon collection, begun in the mid-1930s when the works of 17th century Italian painters were unfashionable, is considered the finest collection of 17th and 18th century Italian paintings formed in Britain this century.



Prize exhibit: Annibale Carracci's *Coronation of the Virgin* Photograph: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Above left: Denis Mahon

Starvation fears for dementia patients

Ian Burrell

Dementia sufferers are being left to starve in NHS hospitals and care homes by staff who do not understand their condition, campaigners have warned.

The Alzheimer's Disease Society has compiled a dossier of complaints from people who have watched patients waste away because they are unable to feed themselves.

The concerns follow the *Hunger in Hospital* report compiled by the national hospitals watchdog, the Association of Community Health Councils, and first reported by *The Independent*.

The report, out earlier this month, showed that many patients were going without food in hospital. Relatives claimed that some people had starved to death.

The ADS is concerned for the welfare of patients with dementia who are awaiting treatment for physical ailments on wards where staff are not used to Alzheimer's Disease.

Harry Cayton, director of the society, said: "They are not being looked after by specialist nurses but by people with no specific training in dealing with dementia."

The society is in talks with the Royal College of Physicians to improve training of hospital staff in helping patients with dementia. It would also like small sections of general wards to be reserved for dementia patients and specialist staff.

Mr Cayton said: "Patients are being expected to feed themselves when they are not even aware that they have been given a meal."

The ADS has compiled a dossier of cases from around the country of dementia patients who have been allowed to go without food. It is compiling a report on the scale of the problem nationally.

Among those who have complained is Ruth Finch, a health professional from Essex, who said her aunt had been left to

go without food and drink in a hospital in Chelmsford, in November. Ms Finch was warned by a hospital orderly that her aunt was not being fed. She said:

"When I asked the nurses I was told variously that she could feed herself, that it wasn't in the nursing plan for her to be fed and that they were too busy."

On one occasion, Ms Finch was told that although her aunt had declined a main course she had "enjoyed" a pudding.

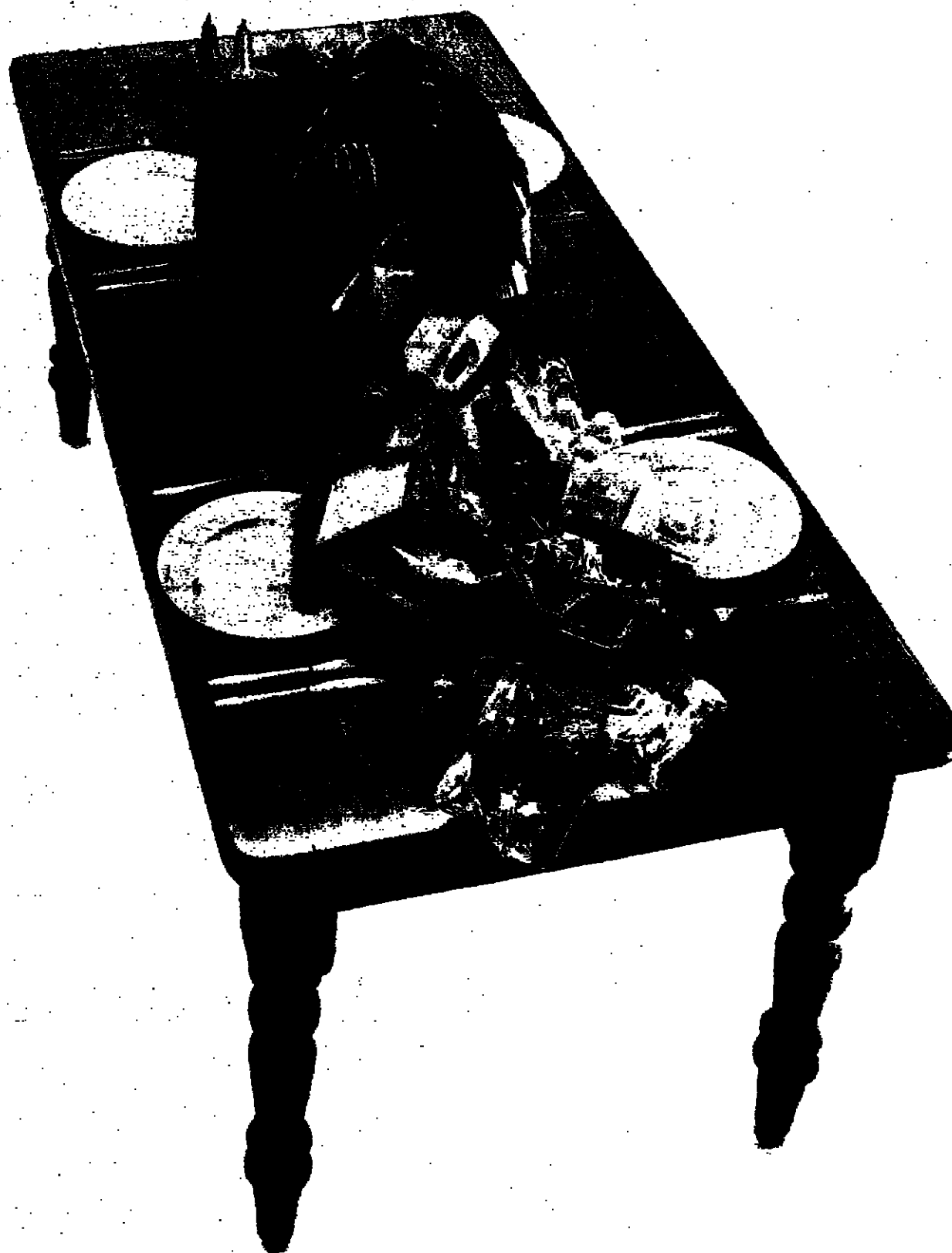
"As I approached the bedside I could clearly see the square of sponge pudding in one piece on the floor at her feet," she said. "Frequently food was left out of reach, some in cellophane wraps that defeated people or people were left asleep. Trays were collected without notice as to what had been eaten."

Beverley Kite, 59, of Camden, north London, said she had to sit and feed her mother in a north London hospital. Her mother, Ada Wheeler, 89, has dementia but had been admitted to the hospital for a hip replacement.

Ms Kite said that her mother and other patients with dementia had been left without food by auxiliary staff who had no understanding of the condition. She said: "People with dementia will die before they ever complain that they are not being fed. The auxiliary staff are not trained. They will go up to someone with dementia and ask them if they are hungry. When they get no answer they take the food away."

Maureen Sebastianelli, from North Shields, said hospital staff had little understanding of patients with dementia, such as her husband Victor.

The retired forklift truck driver was admitted to a surgical ward after breaking a thigh bone. His meals were often taken away still wrapped in the cling-film which he could not remove. Mrs Sebastianelli said: "The nurses are not up on dementia people. They need to be watched every minute, it is very, very hard."



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news

Labour pledge on NHS schemes

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

The Labour Party has written to Tory MPs promising that any incoming administration would honour private finance schemes for National Health Service hospitals that have been signed before the general election.

Where a contract has not been signed by the time a future Labour government took office, Chris Smith, the party's health spokesman, has told the MPs: "We will be seeking urgent ways of speeding up the process."

Mr Smith said any hospitals at the head of the list would continue to receive priority attention. The letters mark a sharp shift in policy from his predecessor, Harriet Harman, who attacked the private finance initiative as privatisation.

It was raised by Stephen Dorrell, the Secretary of State for Health, in a Commons debate led by Labour to attack the Government over the rise in waiting list figures to a record total of more than a million.

Mr Dorrell said that although Mr Smith had done a U-turn on

Labour policy, he had given no explanation of how an incoming Labour government would speed up the provision of private finance for hospitals, which could help to cut the waiting lists. "The letters are a sham," said Mr Dorrell.

He defended the figures for waiting lists, insisting that the number waiting for more than a year had been brought down from an average 200,000 to 22,000 by the Government's changes to the NHS, and by the Patient's Charter which insists on treatment within 18 months.

Mr Smith said that in spite of an assurance by the Government last week that cancer patients were not waiting for treatment, 42 per cent of cancer patients had to wait more than 30 days for treatment.

The NHS is seen by Labour as one of the key areas where Labour can defeat the Tories at the election, and all leave was cancelled for last night's vote, forcing Michael Portillo, the Secretary of State for Defence, to delay a trip to Hong Kong. But Mr Dorrell is defending the Government's position by

going on the offensive, with a series of initiatives for the expansion of family doctor services. He is to publish a draft Bill to encourage patients to take out private insurance for long-term care if they need it in their old age, to avoid having to sell their homes to pay for treatment.

He accused Labour of a "vacuum" over health policy and "empty rhetoric" but Mr Smith used the Opposition debate to warn voters in the Wirral South by-election on Thursday that if a Tory government was elected, it would herald the break-up of

the NHS, and a switch to private health, a charge which Mr Dorrell has vehemently denied.

Accusing ministers of "massaging" hospital waiting list figures ahead of the by-election, he charged Mr Dorrell with "running rather than leading" instead of addressing the real issues and problems affecting the health service.

Opening the debate on the NHS, Mr Smith warned of a "general deterioration in the state of the health service".

Leading article, page 13

DAVID
Aaronovitch

Spiritual moment on the benches

Westminster is a bad place to find MPs at the moment – they are to be discovered just about anywhere else; 200 Labour MPs have, we are told, been campaigning in the Wirral, along with 50 Tories. Given that yesterday's keynote health debate was attended by fewer than 100 MPs in total, perhaps it would have been better to move business up to the Denis Thatcher suite in the Village Hotel, Brumborough. There, after prawn cocktails washed down with Mateus Rosé, Mr Deibel and Mr Smith could have traded statistics until it was time to go back on the knocker.

But those happy few who remained witnessed a rather moving, spiritual exchange. It came during the monthly five minutes in which the MP who represents the Church Commissioners, Michael Alison (C. Selby), answers questions from members about the Church of England.

The first up was Simon Hughes who – as a Liberal Democrat sitting for the seat of Bermondsey – is a kind of secular bishop, sent to save souls in a savage land. His first three Special Interests listed as Human Rights and Civil Liberties, Youth Affairs and Social Injustice, Mr Hughes reminds me of a youngish curate from a sitcom – always about to be let down by the worldliness of others.

He wished to deprecate the recent remarks of the ex-Archbishop of Canterbury criticising modern services. But the church should seek to "involve everybody", gushed The Rev Hughes, adding with ghoulishly vicarish matinee, "let's get 'em all in!"

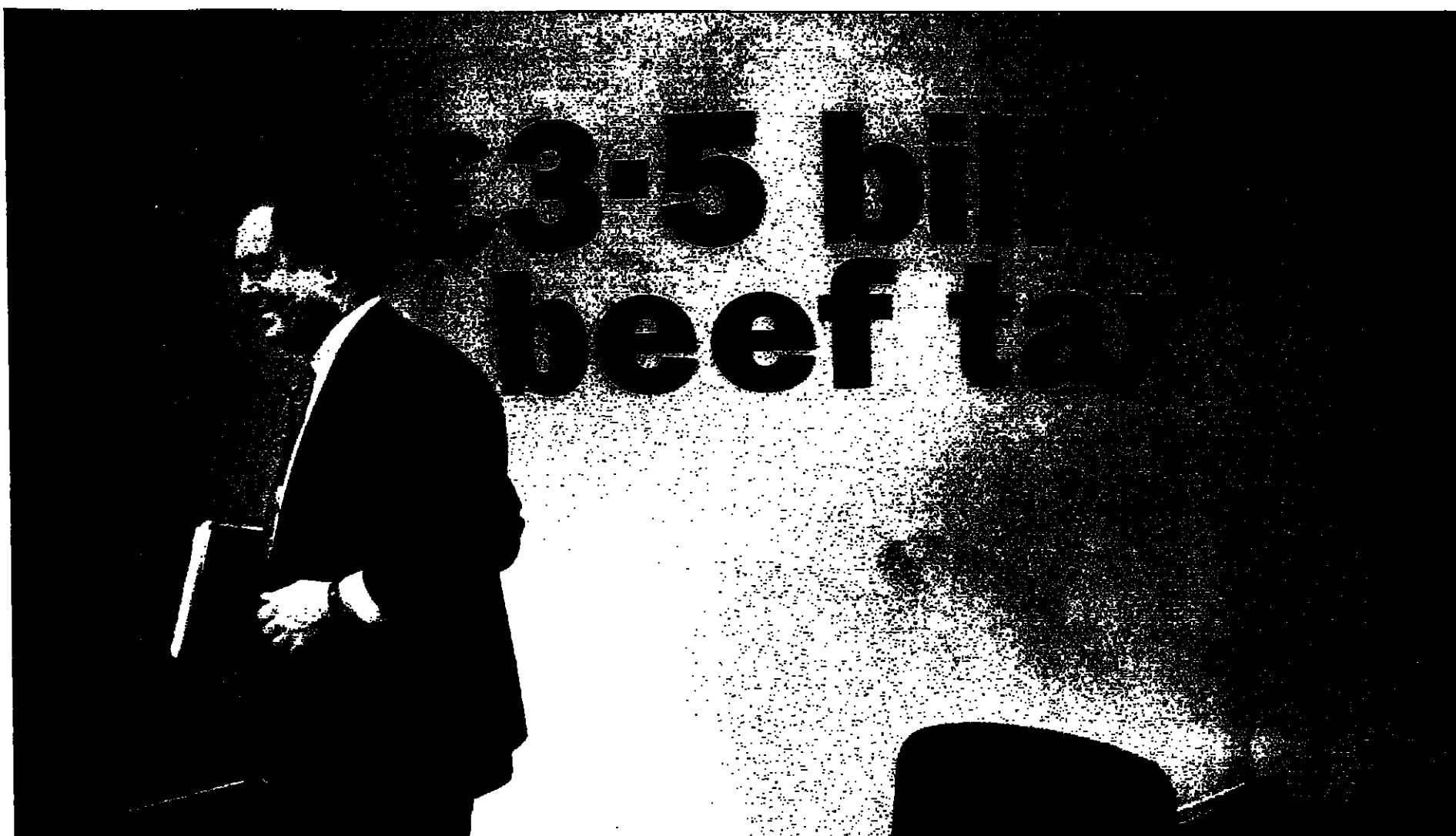
Oh! I don't want to be "got in", so that I can sing songs of social injustice alongside Simon Hughes; I don't think it's Parliament's business how many people go to church (or to synagogue or temple or mosque). But Mr Alison did. It was not just "Happy Clappies", who should be welcomed, but "the Militant Tendency, the National Front and others whose views are known to the congregation and in more exalted circles". This was a bit unnerving. I'd understood about High Church, Low Church, traditional and evangelical – but the revelation that Militant were involved came as a shock. What do they argue for at General Synod? Nationalise the top 200 sacraments? Punitive tithes for fat-cat archbishops?

Newham's Tony Banks tried to help out. He is a disestablishment man, and – perversely – took the side of tradition. What was driving people out of church, he said, were all these here new-fangled services. "People don't go to church to be felt up by the person next to them," he said mystifyingly, "they go to have the hand of God laid upon them, not the hand of someone else." I think that something nasty once happened to Mr Banks in a church, and he has never quite recovered.

Mr Alison was unsympathetic. Never mind the Happy Clappies, he said, "the honourable gentleman – at-arse – represents the Shouty-Louty tendency!" who – presumably – go about breaking tambourines, belching during contemplation and heckling Simon Hughes.

The tone was raised by none other than Michael Fabricant, who wished to draw attention to the 801st anniversary of Lichfield Cathedral. "Last night," he told the House happily, "there was a service for Lichfield Girl Guides!" "Bet you were there!" shouted shouty-louty Tony. Mr Banks is almost certainly right; last week Mr Fabricant joined the celebrations of Lichfield Morris Men, dressed in waistcoat and ribbons.

On Sunday night I am sure that enthusiasm won out over discretion yet again, and that Mr F will have managed to squeeze into a fetching little blue outfit, complete with the statutory woggles. Ging-gang-goolie-goolie-wotcha!



Meaty issue: John Prescott leaving yesterday's press conference after saying that disposing of BSE waste could take another 13 years

Photograph: David Rose

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Backlog of carcasses poses health risk, Prescott warns

Charles Arthur
Science Editor

The backlog of cattle carcasses waiting to be incinerated after the BSE crisis will take 13 years to clear because of "government incompetence", the Labour Party claimed yesterday. Just a week after a censure motion against the Government over its handling of the BSE crisis, John Prescott, Labour's deputy leader, reignited the row, alleging that a "BSE map" of Britain showed that "no one is far from a BSE storage site or rendering plant, or the incinerators and power

stations being considered for burning BSE waste". He also claimed that the backlog of beef carcasses and rendered remains now awaiting incineration was creating a health problem. "We have heard of examples where carcasses are being piled up outside warehouses waiting to be burnt," he said. "This is public health information and we should all be aware of it."

He also attacked the "beef tax" created by the problem, which has cost Britain £3.5bn through lost exports, compensation paid to farmers and the cost of administering the culling, storage and incineration

of all cattle over 30 months old. But the claims were dismissed as "deliberate scaremongering" by Douglas Hogg, Minister of Agriculture, who accused Mr Prescott of trying to "undermine confidence in British beef". He insisted that the remaining carcasses presented "no risk to public health" because the most potentially infectious parts had been removed at abattoirs and incinerated.

The Intervention Board of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said yesterday that it would be "extremely unlikely" that the rate of incineration of rendered

waste would continue at its present slow rate.

So far, the remains of just 4 per cent of the 1.27 million cattle slaughtered so far under a culling scheme agreed with the European Union have been incinerated. Only one company, ReChem, near Southampton, has a permit to burn such waste, to a total of 2,000 tonnes annually. But a spokeswoman for the Intervention Board said that nine other companies were now submitting tenders. "There is 168,000 tonnes of ground cattle remains in store, and 62,000 tonnes in cold stores waiting to be rendered," she said.

Portillo is holed up in the bunker as Blair finds the right range

Anthony Bevins
Political Editor

The difference between the Conservative and Labour election machines was shown yesterday when Tony Blair spent more than two hours at a Wirral hospital while Michael Portillo, the Secretary of State for Defence, visited a private golf club at nearby Eastham.

Health has been identified as the voters' prime concern in Thursday's Wirral South by-election, and the local media swamped Mr Blair's visit to the Arrowe Park Hospital, just outside the constituency. Labour was giving them what they wanted.

Meanwhile, over in the Tory camp the candidate, Les Byrom, toured the offices of a cable

communications company, accompanied by six party workers and a company photographer. Cabling has not yet registered as an election issue.

Mr Byrom later welcomed Mr Portillo to his beleaguered campaign and the Secretary of State spent an hour giving interviews to television and radio at Eastham golf club.

Mr Blair's visit, which included tours of various hospital wards and departments, concluded with a lengthy private briefing session with hospital managers and staff and representatives.

At the end of his third visit to the constituency, the Labour leader said: "I don't know who Mr Portillo will be meeting in the golf club, but I think you will find in every part of this constitu-

cy there are people who were Conservative that are now coming over to the Labour Party. I think Mr Portillo will find that as well, and one of the reasons for that is the type of conservatism Mr Portillo represents."

Mr Blair said that the one-nation conservatism represented by Sir Edward Heath was on the way out and that explained why a lot of people were switching to Labour.

But if yesterday's campaign showed up the difference between Labour and the Tory machines, it also illustrated the difference between a national press obsessed by the arrival of Chris Booth, and what she was wearing and a regional media that was covering health and other local concerns.

Explaining the decision to

give the local media a special, preferential session with Mr Blair, one aide said there was another difference between local and national media – "people trust the local media".

With just two days to go to polling, today's campaign will be dominated by a visit from Michael Heseltine, the Deputy Prime Minister, who said three weeks ago that the Tories could expect a "kick" from the Wirral South voters. Labour will get a return visit from its deputy leader, John Prescott, and the Liberal Democrat leader, Paddy Ashdown, will spend an hour at a local primary school.

Labour will conclude its campaign tomorrow night with an open public meeting – a rare event in modern campaigning. Donald MacIntyre, page 15

Russians target UK spies in debt

Fran Abrams
Political Correspondent

Russian spies who are trying to infiltrate the British security services may be playing on agents with financial problems in order to subvert them, a House of Commons committee suggested yesterday.

The report says that all three intelligence services – MI5, MI6 and GCHQ – have had to withdraw security clearance from staff and contractors because they were in debt. The end of the Cold War has meant that while fewer agents are likely to betray their country for ideological reasons but are more likely to do so for money, it adds.

The annual report of the all-party Intelligence and Security Committee says Aldrich Ames, the CIA man who acted as a double agent for the KGB and whose activities led to the deaths of several of his colleagues, undermines the need for vigilance. Ames used much of the \$3m he was paid by the Russians to fund his second marriage to a "shopaholic" who was found to have 500 pairs of shoes. The committee warns that British agents must be watched constantly.

Tom King, chairman of the committee and a former Secretary of State for Defence, said there was no reason to believe that a British Aldrich Ames was operating undiscovered.

"There is absolutely no evidence at all that there is any question of a similar traitor working within the British intelligence agencies but the lesson to learn from the tragic and really awful experience in the US... is that no country can afford to sit back and assume that everything is all right," he said. Ames, who was tried for his activities in 1994, caused nine colleagues to be executed and a further three imprisoned, and the Commons committee says that the fall-out from the case has not yet stopped.

Its report says that in addition to staff being vetted when they join, their circumstances should be randomly checked throughout their service.

It also warns of the risks of other countries using their intelligence agencies to gain commercial advantage over Britain. In one recent case, the American State Department advised some of its companies not to exhibit at the Paris Air Show because of fears of espionage, and John Major had asked the committee to look into the problem in this country. However, it concluded that Britain's agents were protecting its interests.

"The security service works both to counter the real and continuing threat to UK economic interests, and to provide protective security advice and assistance to government and direct to industry," it says.

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Kremlin sees silver lining in deal on Nato expansion

Phil Reeves
Moscow

It could be bluff, or it could be sincere. But, at least in public, Russia is slowly, tantalisingly, edging closer to striking a deal over Nato's plans to expand into Central and Eastern Europe.

The signs have been steadily trickling in. Yevgeny Primakov, Russia's Foreign Minister, yesterday left Brussels saying he was cautiously optimistic after his second meeting in five weeks with Nato's

Secretary-General, Javier Solana.

As the former Russian spy-master flew to Norway, Nato officials claimed genuine headway was being made with the issue, which has disrupted Moscow's relations with the West, revived a mood of Cold War suspicion and caused a political outcry in Russia.

Their hopes will have been further raised on Sunday, when President Boris Yeltsin said he had agreed to look for a compromise over Nato expansion,

and suggested it could be found at his summit with President Bill Clinton, in Helsinki, next month.

However, there is a whiff of gamesmanship in the air. By appearing willing to do business, the Russian President may hope to deflect blame on to the Americans should Helsinki bear no fruit. By holding out the prospect of a quick agreement, and with it a publicity triumph for the White House, he is putting pressure on his opponents.

The risk of failure remains, despite a genuine softening in the Nato debate, which was aided by last week's visit to Moscow by the US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright.

Both sides have agreed in principle to set up a Russia-Nato consultative council with its own secretariat. But crucial differences remain, particularly over Moscow's demand for a legally binding charter with Nato, to be ratified by Nato member governments, which could take years.

Yet Mr Yeltsin could also do with a publicity coup, after eight months of almost uninterrupted absence from the Kremlin in which resentment has swelled to a roar of anger over unpaid wages and pensions. If it contained some weighty and face-saving concessions, especially on the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty, a Nato deal in Helsinki may have some appeal.

In the past few days, he has begun the first perilous steps towards his comeback, albeit a

belated return, almost one-sixth of his way through his second term.

This weekend he had recovered some of his bamboozling form when he appeared on television to fulminate against his political foes, warning that they shouldn't attack "too hard, because I can fight back".

Yesterday, the President was on the nation's screens again, chastising his Prime Minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, for failing to pay overdue wages and pensions and inviting him to

shake up his team. Such theatrical public scoldings of high officials are a standard tactic in the Yeltsin playbook, but it is a sign that he is on the mend.

So, too, was his decision to meet two of his most powerful allies yesterday, the new chairman of the Constitutional Court, Marat Baglay, and the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, Alexy II.

This burst of presidential activity is part of the warm-up for the ultimate test of his health, his speech to parliament on

6 March. It will please his advisers but is fraught with risks. His doctors and allies are aware that if he is forced to take to his bed again, the pressure on him to stand down will be hard to resist.

And if Mr Yeltsin goes, it would throw Nato's expansion plans into chaos. Even the most hardline Nato general is likely to think twice before pressing ahead with a policy that could swing Russian voters even further in the direction of anti-Western nationalism.



Question times: Mr Kohl's confidence has been shaken by public alarm over unemployment. Photograph: Reuters

Kohl seeks coalition on jobs crisis

Tom Heneghan
Bonn

Germany's government and opposition pushed off into uncharted waters yesterday, unsure whether their emergency tax-reform talks will lead to a grand coalition or mark the start of a bitter 1998 election campaign.

Cancellor Helmut Kohl and Social Democrat (SPD) chairman Oskar Lafontaine have both denied their rare "summit"

would lead to a cabinet reshuffle to include the SPD, but it aims at least for an all-party effort to fight an unemployment record of 4.7 million which threatens to prevent Germany from qualifying for the single currency. "Pull us out of the crisis," *Bild*, Germany's largest daily, appealed in a headline.

The issues are clear. Since the SPD majority in the upper house of parliament can block any new tax law, Mr Kohl needs its support to cut taxes by

DM30bn (£11.3bn) and lower unit labour costs, thus promoting more jobs.

Public alarm over rising unemployment is now so fierce that the SPD cannot afford to stonewall. Voters in next year's elections would punish them for delaying a solution. But the main opposition party cannot compromise so much that it ends up helping Mr Kohl build a re-election campaign on the claim that he pulled back Germany from the brink.

The best-case scenario calls for agreement on laws this year to start cutting taxes in 1998. In the worst case, both parties will revert to confrontation to pin the blame for the failure on the other.

Recent polls show Mr Kohl's centre-right coalition trailing an opposition alliance of the SPD and Greens. The Chancellor does worse than either possible SPD challenger, Mr Lafontaine, or Lower Saxony's state premier, Gerhard Schröder.

Netanyahu at bay as graft row worsens

Patrick Cockburn
Jerusalem

The political future of Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, is in increasing doubt after the disclosure at the weekend that police had warned him he might face criminal charges over the long-running scandal surrounding the appointment as attorney-general of a party hack sympathetic to the legal problems of members of his government.

Mr Netanyahu's attempt to disclaim personal responsibility for appointing Roni Bar-On, an obscure Jerusalem lawyer, to one of the highest judicial posts, exacerbated divisions in the cabinet.

Mr Netanyahu's lawyer said he should not be blamed, because he was misled by Tzahi Hanegbi, the Justice Minister, about the acceptability of Mr Bar-On to the Supreme Court.

Israeli television said, however, that when police questioned Mr Netanyahu last week about the affair they found his answers "evasive".

Whatever the outcome of the scandal, it has weakened Mr Netanyahu politically when he hoped to benefit, internationally and at home, from signing the Hebron agreement. Nahum Barnea, an Israeli columnist, wrote: "It is not Jerusalem which is really bothering Netanyahu right now, but rather the police investigation."

Three ministers have threatened to resign over the affair. Avigdor Kahalani, Minister of Internal Security, said that if the accusations turn out to be true "the government has no right to continue". Natan Sharansky, Trade and Commerce Minister, said: "Should it turn out that just 10 per cent of what was revealed up to now is correct, the government has no future."

Dan Meridor, Finance Minister, believes that if the allegations are confirmed, "this is the worst affair in the history of the state".

The police investigation started on 22 January, when Ayala Herson, a reporter for Israeli television, alleged that Aryeh Dohi, leader of the Shas party, which is in the ruling coalition, and who is on trial for corrup-



Hanegbi: Said to have misled PM over top legal job

tion, had orchestrated the candidacy of Mr Bar-On, who held office for one day. The specific accusation was that Mr Dohi had threatened to block the Hebron agreement with the Palestinians unless Mr Bar-On got the job and Mr Dohi won a plea bargain.

During the month-long police investigation it has become clear Mr Dohi and others close to the government who were on trial or facing indictment were all involved in the appointment of Mr Bar-On. Worse, from Mr Dohi's point of view, his own lawyer, Dan Avi-Yitzhak, resigned last week and denounced his former client. This has created the suspicion that it was he who leaked the story to Ms Herson in the first place.

Mr Netanyahu has fought his way out of tight corners before. But he has yet to come up with a convincing explanation of his determination to replace the previous attorney-general with somebody more malleable and dependent on his goodwill. During the first weeks of the investigation it appeared possible the Prime Minister would be unscathed by the police investigation. In questioning him about the affair, however, police say he repeatedly said: "I don't know" and "I don't recall."

They then cautioned him that he might face criminal charges.

Following this disclosure, Nissim Zivli, secretary-general of the Labour party, called for a fresh election, although

Labour itself is divided. Mr Netanyahu has hired his own lawyer, Yaacov Weiruth, a top criminal attorney, who repeatedly implied over the weekend, in defence of his client, that the Prime Minister was misled by Mr Hanegbi.

This may be good legal tactics if Mr Netanyahu's objective is to stay out of court, but he could pay a heavy political price for throwing one of his cabinet to the wolves.

Visiting King Hussein in Jordan over the weekend, Mr Netanyahu accused his opponents of counting him out too early. He said: "I intend to continue to lead the state of Israel. I heard the opposition is getting ready for new elections. I have good advice for you: 'Wait. You have a good four years left in the opposition'."

The Prime Minister's office believes Mr Netanyahu is the victim of a campaign by the Israeli media. It particularly objects to analogies between Mr Netanyahu and President Richard Nixon during Watergate. At the weekend, Channel 2, Israel's commercial television channel, showed *All the President's Men*, about the scandal.

Brussels - Malcolm Rifkind, the Foreign Secretary, condemned Israeli plans to build a settlement at Har Homa, in east Jerusalem, writes Sarah Helm. The European Union viewed the plans as "counter-productive to the overall success of the peace process".

Whitewater counsel faces new battle over credibility

Rupert Cornwell
Washington

After a week of controversy bordering on ridicule, the White House special counsel, Kenneth Starr, must rebuild the credibility of his investigation, and satisfy the demands of an increasingly impatient public for results in his 30-month probe of the Clintons and their business dealings in Arkansas.

Yesterday Mr Starr was back at work leading his teams of prosecutors in Washington and Little Rock, amid reports that on one vexed Whitewater issue at least, closure may be at hand. Like the FBI, the US Park Police and his predecessor as special counsel before him, Mr Starr is now said to have concluded - *mirabile dictu* - that the former White House deputy counsel Vince Foster, did not commit suicide on 20 July 1993.

Contrary to the unshakable belief of conservative conspiracy theorists, Mr Starr is satisfied that foul play was not involved, nor did the President or his wife take part in a cover-up of the circumstances of the death of a close friend and aide entrusted, among other things, with personal Clinton papers relating to the original Whitewater land deal.

But this move alone is unlikely to restore the authority of his investigation, after a week in which he first announced he would step down on 1 August to become dean of a new law college at Malibu, California - only to reverse himself after bitter criticism from his right-wing supporters that he was walking out on a job half done.

Mr Starr insists his initial announcement did not imply he had decided he did not have enough evidence against either

the First Lady or the President to bring charges. The former Bush Administration solicitor-general says his investigation is still "moving forward," and he will stay on as long as required.

But the damage had been done. Despite the disclaimers, both pro- and anti-Clinton factions believe Mr Starr could not possibly have contemplated quitting if he was poised to take the historic step of indicting a First Lady and perhaps her husband (though most scholars believe that under the Constitution, he could not bring criminal charges against an incumbent president, but would present his evidence to Congress which would determine whether to start impeachment hearings).

In fact, his case on the issue where Mr Clinton is most vulnerable, that as Governor of Arkansas in 1986 he helped to organise an illegal \$300,000

loan to his former business partner James and Susan McDougall, rests on the frail testimony of McDougall, a convicted felon who has already twice changed his story.

As for Mrs Clinton, it is reckoned increasingly doubtful a court of law would find that the First Lady knowingly took part in a separate bogus land deal a decade ago in Arkansas, and then lied about it to the prosecutors and a federal grand jury.

But if the threat posed by one special prosecutor may be diminishing, the Clintons' lives could soon be tormented by a new one. After a string of new revelations of apparent White House fundraising abuses involving Asian Americans, even some Democratic legislators at the weekend joined Republicans in urging Janet Reno, the Attorney General, to appoint a counsel.

Empire State killer was broke

David Usborne
New York

The Arab gunman in the Empire State Building attack was distraught over losing his life savings and had no ties to Palestinian radical groups, his relatives said yesterday.

A security review was underway in the wake of Sunday night's shooting rampage by Ali Hassan Abu-Kamal, 69, on the New York skyscraper's observation deck which left two dead and others wounded. After the attack, Abu-Kamal shot

himself in the head and later died in hospital.

The dead victim was identified as 27-year-old Chris Burmeister, a member of a Danish rock band.

The gunman's daughter, Linda Abu-Samra, said she could not believe her father, an English teacher, would resort to violence. "I'm in shock. I can't believe my father carried out this act," she said.

The gunman's son-in-law, Marwan Abu-Samra, said Abu-Kamal had ties to Palestinian militant groups. Mr Abu

Samra said that Abu-Kamal planned to invest his savings in the United States. However, he called home on Sunday and said he had financial problems and could not send tuition money to one of his sons, who is studying civil engineering in Russia.

The mayor of New York, Rudolph Giuliani, sought to divert some of the responsibility on to the state of Florida, where Kamal apparently purchased the semi-automatic gun used in the attack. Florida has gun laws that allow foreigners to buy weapons in the state.

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Deng Xiaoping's cremation: 100,000 line the streets as party ensures smooth transition of power

China's leaders put unity to fore as last red emperor is given a macabre farewell

Teresa Poole
and Ted Plafker
Peking

"Unity after death", should have read the banners above the body of Deng Xiaoping as he lay wrapped in the red national flag and surrounded by flowers for a last macabre media appearance. For that was the message meant for the Chinese people last night, as state television broadcast the first and last pictures of the late patriarch's body, his grey-faced corpse now a centre-stage prop for those who would inherit his mantle.

Lined up solemnly to the front was President Jiang Zemin, the prime minister Li Peng, and the other five members of the standing committee of the party's politburo - the most powerful sub-committee in China. To one side was grouped the grieving Deng clan, including his wife and five children, sobbing as they bade farewell to a relative, and perhaps also shedding a tear for their lost status as the first family.

Arranged behind were about a hundred party and government elders, the remnants of the Long March generation such as Yang Shangkun and Bo Yibo, still very much alive as political wheeler-dealers. And all around were the state television cameras and photographers, failing to keep out of each other's way as they recorded for posterity this media show of unity.

The elite of Chinese politics had gathered at the military hospital to pay their last respects

the crowds lining the streets were less demonstrative. They were also less well-informed about how the morning's events were due to unfold. Indeed, confusion reigned among those gathered outside about when, or even whether, the cortege would be passing by.

In what is perhaps an apt metaphor for China as a whole at this tender juncture, the curious onlookers seemed only to know that the great man had died, that his demise has occasioned a good deal of bustle, and that they might or might not, from where they stood, be able to observe it directly.

Clearly, they wanted to. "I want to pay my respects. Deng Xiaoping is the greatest figure in China's modern history, and I just feel I want to be here," said a woman in her thirties in a comment that echoed the sentiments of many.

Absent, however, was any sense that high political stakes are in play. There is among Peking residents a fair diversity of opinions about the prospects for Jiang Zemin's long term survival as China's leader, but few who believe that the system itself might change as a result of his replacement by any of his known contenders who are, after all, cut from essentially the same cloth.

"The framework of economic reforms left behind by Deng Xiaoping is going to be followed. Everyone knows this, and it is only a matter of how fast or how slow," said a Peking academic who specialises in Taiwanese affairs.

Regardless of whether such certainty is justified, it marks a sharp contrast with China's reaction to the death in early 1976 of Premier Zhou Enlai. For many of the Peking residents old enough to remember it, thoughts turned repeatedly to the day his corpse was transported to the same cemetery.

"I was standing on the Avenue of Eternal Peace for Zhou Enlai also, and the feeling was very different. There was such pressure then to oppose the Gang of Four, who were in control, and there were very few ways to express dissatisfaction," said a man in his seventies, retired as an editor with the state-run Xinhua news agency.

"Now there seems to be no kind of struggle like that, and so people are just here to pay their respects."

Some of those too young to remember such times, however, reacted more cynically to the whole affair. Precisely 12 hours after Deng's cremation, a young waitress could not keep from talking back to the most demonstrative of the mourners seen sobbing on the television in her noodle shop near the Peking train station.

"What are you crying about, granny? My, but all the noble people come out when something like this happens!" said the 19-year-old migrant from Anhui province.

In the private hall of the cemetery, the family bade their final farewells. "Papa is not dead," wailed the Mr Deng's youngest daughter, Deng Rong. "Today will be the official memorial service for 10,000 invited officials in the Great Hall of the People. Just next door, in Tiananmen Square, stands the vast mausoleum which houses Chairman Mao's increasingly waxy-looking corpse. The first few years of the post-Deng era may decide just how long it must be before the Great Helmsman can finally be given a dignified burial.

In contrast to the emotion-choked mourners who were bussed in past the police cordons and then featured on state-run television's saturation coverage of the ceremony,



Final act: Deng's widow, Zhuo Lin, kisses her husband's body at yesterday's funeral ceremony watched by daughters Deng Nan, left, and Deng Rong

Photograph: Reuters

Dynasty is left exposed to resentment

Teresa Poole

While the emperor lived, his offspring made the most of the opportunities on offer to China's first family, whether it was by securing attractive business opportunities, signing lucrative book deals, or selling artwork to collectors. Those who sought out the patriarch's children must have assumed that a Deng business partner or the purchase of an expensive painting by a Deng daughter might open up other channels of useful communication.

Now that Deng Xiaoping is dead, his five children will have to tread more carefully if they are to hang on to their privileges. Resentment among ordinary Chinese runs strong

against such "princelings", the children of China's top communist party leadership.

Politically they are also vulnerable: China's current leaders are unlikely explicitly to target the former patriarch's children in the short term, but will demand that they fall into line behind the current leadership strategy for a smooth transition. After today's memorial service, the Deng family may find it prudent to adopt a considerably lower profile now that their main claim to influence is gone.

In the closing years of Mr Deng's life, it was his children and his wife, Zhuo Lin, who, if not powers behind the throne, did control who crossed the threshold of the antechamber.

For most of the Nineties, his favourite daughter, Deng Rong, worked as his private secretary and "imperial lip-reader", accompanying him in public in order to translate his heavy Sichuan accent into standard Chinese and to bellow the comments of others into his less-deaf ear.

When she wrote a hagiography of her father, the foreign publishing rights were snapped up by none other than Rupert Murdoch - for a reported \$1m. Property deals in Shenzhen were another sideline.

In some instances, members of the former patriarch's family have found themselves uncomfortably close to scandal, though never directly implicated. The husband of Deng Rong

is He Ping, who was in an embarrassing position last year when a subsidiary of the China Poly group, where he held a senior position, was linked to a Chinese AK-47 smuggling operation into the United States.

One of Deng's sons, Deng Zhifang, stepped down in 1995 from a senior position at a Hong Kong listed subsidiary of the mainland state steel giant, Shougang Corp, after an associate, Zhou Beifeng, who was head of another Hong Kong Shougang company, was arrested on corruption charges and subsequently given a suspended death sentence. Deng Zhifang also has a number of property development interests.

The eldest son, Deng Pufang,

who has been in a wheelchair since jumping out of a window during the Cultural Revolution when persecuted by Red Guards, saw his Kang Hua investment company closed in the Eighties on allegations of irregular business activities. Since then he has gained more respect by devoting his time to working for China's disabled.

Deng Lin, the rather jovial artistic eldest daughter, shunned politics and business in favour of painting, and her works have enjoyed considerable popularity, as well as healthy prices. In Hong Kong in 1993, she exhibited a series of large carpet-tapestries which were priced at up to £30,000.

"Deng Lin bears the benefits and burdens of her father's

power," said the catalogue. She wanted to be judged "without prejudice". Her husband, Wu Jianchang, found his marital connections no hindrance to building up a small business empire in Hong Kong, heading three quoted subsidiaries of the state China National Non-Ferrous Metals Industry Corporation.

The most overtly political of Mr Deng's children is Deng Nan, a physicist who is vice-minister of the Science and Technology Commission. Her political influence behind the scenes is difficult to gauge, but she was rumoured to have persuaded her father to make his southern tour in 1992, the event which sparked China's recent economic boom.

Albright stands firm on human rights

"I said I would tell it like it is, and I told it like it is," said the US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, of China's human rights record. "I don't want to speculate over whether I was able to narrow the differences or not," she added, saying that "if there was not further progress" the US would back the annual resolution against China at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva next month. writes Teresa Poole.

round-the-world trip, the new secretary of state's last stop in Peking was the most challenging, attempting to set the tone for the next phase of the volatile Sino-US relationship just days after the death of the former patriarch, Deng Xiaoping.

Yesterday, Ms Albright became the first senior foreign diplomat since Mr Deng's death to meet President Jiang Zemin, the prime minister, Li Peng, and the foreign minister, Qian Qichen, whom she de-

scribed as all in "deep mourning". A US official said Mr Jiang was "quite sombre, appropriately so". However, the official added: "I thought he looked quite confident, and quite sure of himself."

In a rare indication that the Chinese president might partly write his own speeches, the official said: "President Jiang talked at length about the legacy of Deng Xiaoping, about the memorial service, and the fact that he would be giving the pri-

mary address, and how hard he'd been working on it and how much he'd been thinking about it."

Ms Albright said she had expected that her visit would be cancelled, coming as it did on the day Mr Deng was cremated and on the eve of this morning's memorial gathering.

The fact it went ahead was "a very important sign of their desire to pursue the US relationship and the continuity within it", she said.

Ms Albright was scheduled

to fly out of China early today so as to be out of the country before the start of the memorial service for Mr Deng, to which no foreign dignitaries have been invited.

The Secretary of State said she had been received "with the greatest kindness and interest", but there was clearly little time for any substantive progress on the many problems - human rights, market access, Taiwan, weapons sales - which beset the bilateral relationship. However, the improved

tone set towards the end of last year has continued.

"I am confident, based on today's meetings, that the vigorous strategic dialogue that is developing between the US and China will continue," said Ms Albright, confirming that the US Vice-President, Al Gore, will visit Peking next month.

A summit between Mr Jiang and President Bill Clinton is likely before the end of the year, if the Chinese political situation remains stable.

Portillo in Hong Kong rush job

Stephen Vines
Hong Kong
Christopher Bellamy
Defence Correspondent

Michael Portillo, the Secretary of State for Defence, will tomorrow be making a whirlwind tour of Hong Kong, lasting less than a day. Government officials in the colony have been left wondering whether this has more to do with the Conservative Party's leadership concerns than the defence of the realm. Ostensibly, Mr Portillo will be in the colony as part of routine inspection of troop duties. However, he will barely have time to shake hands with the troops up near the Chinese border before being whisked off to see the remnants of the naval presence and the newly arrived Black Watch battalion who have barely had time to unpack.

The suspicion about political motives has been heightened by Mr Portillo's insistence that his



Michael Portillo: Suspicion over motives for his visit

press entourage for the trip should consist of political correspondents rather than defence writers who would normally be present on occasions such as these.

He had been scheduled for a three-day stay in the colony but the lack of a Conservative majority in the House of Commons meant he needed to be present for a parliamentary vote yes-

terday and will not be able to leave London until this afternoon.

From Hong Kong, he will fly to Brunei, where Britain has 950 troops including 600 Gurkhas, all paid for by the Sultan.

The visit is also expected to result in the signature of a deal to buy up to three corvettes - fast but heavily armed small warships of about 1,500 tons each, designed for policing the country's Exclusive Economic Zone and protecting natural resources as well as possible use against the growing threat of piracy.

The deal for the ships, their equipment and related training could be worth up to £250m. Although relatively small in defence terms, the timing of the deal is highly significant in the run-up to the general election and also to a major defence exhibition, called IDEX, in Abu Dhabi next month.

The United Arab Emirates could be in the market for a

much bigger order - six patrol boats and six corvettes.

Ministry of Defence sources said Mr Portillo was due to meet the Sultan during the visit on Thursday. Also on the agenda is a joint military exercise to take place in April called Setia Kawan II, involving 2,500 British personnel, and the Defence Procurement Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Sultan and John Major in 1994.

The brevity of Mr Portillo's visit to Hong Kong serves to underline a feeling of British neglect in the colony. Both Malcolm Rifkind, the Foreign Secretary, and John Prescott, Labour's deputy leader, have truncated recent visits because of parliamentary pressures at home.

Mr Rifkind's visit last week has stirred some controversy because of suggestions that he used his very short time in the colony to engage in Conservative Party fundraising.

However, this has been categorically denied by Wilma Croxson, the vice-chairman of the Conservatives Abroad organisation in Hong Kong who organised a cocktail reception for Mr Rifkind at Hong Kong's luxury Mandarin Hotel.

"It was a fund-raising event," she said regretfully, not enough money was raised from the £24 entrance fee to cover the hire of the room and the drinks. Mr Rifkind stayed for less than half an hour and the subject of party funds was not raised.

It is a far cry from the days when Hong Kong tycoons were among the Conservative Party's main benefactors and John Major was able to walk away from a select dinner with the colony's tycoons after pledges of millions of pounds had been made.

Those same tycoons now want nothing to do with anything British; their benevolence is strictly reserved for the incoming Chinese regime.

Pop concerts that must dance to a different tune

Stephen Vines

Is it safe for children to attend pop concerts featuring "sexy dancing and sexy costumes"? Definitely not, says a Hong Kong urban councillor, Jennifer Chow, who is proposing a classification system, similar to that used for films, so that parents can be warned about what their children might see.

Ms Chow has discovered that concerts used to consist of "one person singing" but "now they use many new selling points such as sexy dancing and sexy costumes".

The chief culprit appears to be the Hong Kong mega-star Leslie Cheung who has just completed a highly successful series of concerts at which he was seen clutching his crotch.

This form of behaviour is not entirely unknown at pop concerts; anyone who has at-

tended a Madonna concert would be startled to learn that Mr Cheung was being unduly provocative.

However Ms Chow says she has conducted a survey of 360 parents and found that 90 per cent were worried about what might be seen at a pop concert.

Ms Chow is a member of the august body which recently decided that Elton John could only perform at an open-air pop concert to mark the handover of Hong Kong if the audience wore headphones so as to reduce the noise level.

Hong Kong seems to have a problem with the performing arts. Films and television programmes depicting violence acts in graphic detail have routinely been declared as suitable family entertainment whereas naked parts of the human body seem to give great offence. A couple of years ago the

colony's Obscene Articles Tribunal ruled that a statue of a naked man by the world renowned sculptress Dame Elisabeth Frink was a Class II piece of work meaning it fell into the category of being either violent, depraved or repulsive. The statue was allowed to remain on display after the penis was covered with a cardboard fig leaf.

Like the Elton John concert which was cancelled, the statue was later withdrawn. It remains to be seen whether Leslie Cheung will also have to be withdrawn from alongside a host of other pop stars. Ms Chow is not without her critics. Ada Wong, another urban councillor, says that Hong Kong youth face problems somewhat more profound than exposure to pop concerts. She said her main concern was the freedom to perform rather than the performance.

Ragged rebels who must face professionals

Andrew Marshall and agencies

Papua New Guinea turned to overseas security advisers after its requests for assistance from Australia for help against rebels were turned down, according to reports in the Australian press.

The Sydney Morning Herald reports today that Papua New Guinea (PNG) requested assistance from Canberra, including electronic intelligence to pinpoint rebel radio broadcasts and body armour. But these requests were turned down. Australia believes there needs to be a politically negotiated solution to the crisis in Bougainville.

At least 10,000 people, mostly civilians, have died in the nine-year separatist civil war in the island of Bougainville, according to official figures compiled from PNG government sources for support for the UN Commission on Human Rights.

The rebel Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) demanded independence from Papua New Guinea after a long-running dispute among indigenous landowners and the Australian operators of what was then the world's largest copper mine, Conzinc Riotinto Australia. CRA, one of Australia's biggest mining companies, itself 49 per cent owned by Britain's RITZ. The people of Bougainville complained that the land had been stolen from them, and that the mine caused deadly pollution.

The rebels are largely armed with home-made rifles, salvaged machine-guns from crashed Second World War aircraft, and even bows and arrows. But despite their pathetic armaments, they forced the mine to close in 1989 and the government army retreated from the island nine months after that. The PNG army has been accused by natives and human rights activists of atrocities ranging from the burning of villages to rape and torture.

Australian newspapers have reported that the government



had approved a \$36m (£22m) covert operation to end the rebellion. Sources in Papua New Guinea have confirmed that over the past two weeks two Russian aircraft have been active between Port Moresby's Jackson Airport and the northern coastal town of Wewak.

The mercenaries are understood to be training at Moem Barracks near Wewak, from where the offensive on the BRA would be launched. The operation could also involve the freeing of five soldiers held captive for six months.

PNG's Prime Minister, Sir Julius Chan, said yesterday that media reports that his government planned to use mercenaries were inaccurate and sensationalist. But he confirmed that his government had hired Sandline International to help train government soldiers. "Yes there is training going on at the moment, training for our under-equipped, under-trained and under-resourced security forces," he said in a statement.

Papua New Guinea Defence Force Chief of Staff Colonel Jack Tuat said the latest training was no different to that involving Australia, New Zealand and the United States. "We are occasionally bringing in people to train our guys on the use of new and specific equipment," Mr Tuat told Reuters.

But the reports have sparked a crisis in relations between Australia and PNG. "We would regard the use of mercenaries as an extremely unwelcome development in the South Pacific," Australian Prime Minister John Howard told parliament yesterday.

Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said he had urged PNG last week not to use mercenaries, adding such a move would significantly damage the country's international standing.



Rebels have defeated troops like (left) the sharpshooter guarding copper mine offices (Popopo). Right: the King's Road HQ of Sandline International



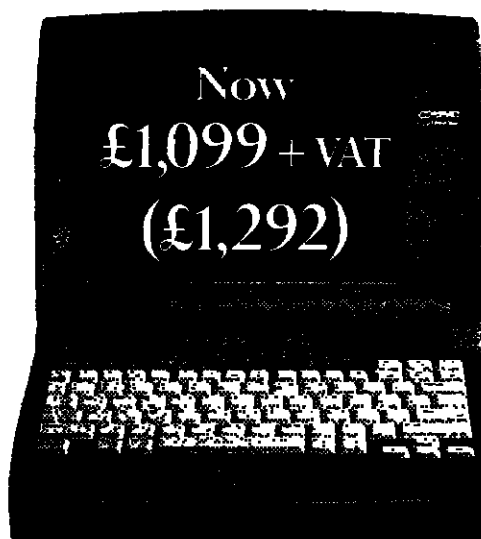
Julius Chan and to other ministers ... was that if there was a resumption of any military activity on Bougainville, then it would be regarded by Australia as absolutely disastrous.

Powerty-stricken Papua New Guinea's willingness to commit \$27m in funds to a secret military adventure is bound to raise questions among donor countries and institutions. However, the Prime Minister said Australia would not threaten to cut off its \$320m aid programme.

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significant shorts

Jewish leader says Rifkind row blown up

Ignatz Bubis, leader of Germany's Jewish community, said British outrage over a German newspaper reference to the Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, as a Jew was overdone. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung's* mention of Mr Rifkind's background may have sounded worse to English-speakers than German-speakers. "In ... German ... it depends on the context. And in the context of the FAZ article, that was clearly not the case." The journalist was trying to point to an irony about Mr Rifkind quoting Luther, added Mr Bubis. "It was perhaps an unfortunate choice of words, but the reaction is completely overdone."

Reuters - Bonn

Demon for fashion

A French woman was given a one-year suspended sentence and told to pay damages for harassing the designer Paco Rabanne by accusing him of satanic powers. Rabanne, who has written on the supernatural, said Josianne Pasquier went to his boutique, trying to dissuade clients from entering "Satan's den".

Reuters - Paris

Sex-for-visas row rocks Taipei

Allegations by the former head of Washington's *de facto* embassy in Taipei that staff extorted sex and money from visa applicants swept Taiwan. James Wood said staff took bribes, \$5m (£3.1m) in visa fees was missing and an investigator forced at least one applicant to trade sex for a visa approval.

Reuters - Taipei

Russian peace-keepers killed

Georgia condemned a blast in the breakaway Abkhazia region which killed three Russian peace-keepers. The head of the Russian mission blamed Georgian "terrorists". The incident occurred when an armoured troop carrier hit a mine.

Reuters - Tbilisi

Pyramid scam propped party

One of Albania's collapsed pyramid schemes paid \$50,000 (£31,250) to the governing Democratic Party before elections in May, according to the state controller's office. The party, accused of widespread vote-rigging, denied profiting from the schemes, which have cost thousands of depositors their savings and led to unrest and calls for the government to resign in responsibility.

AP - Tirana

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Health? Labour will let sleeping dogs lie

Hurry, under the covers. The Blair government is visiting the sick people of Merseyside yesterday, inaugurating a season during which hospital patients up and down the land face sudden conscription as extras in party political hospital drama. But if the anecdotes from the Wirral South campaign, together with polling evidence, hold water, patients will welcome their Labour visitors with more enthusiasm than Tories (Liberal Democrats being above such things as invading hospitals). Health is Labour's issue.

Nothing government ministers can do or say, however sincerely, seems to dislodge Labour's hold on health – not even recollections of the Winter of Discontent, or the fact that of the 49 years' existence of the NHS, the Tories have presided over 35. Under the Tories as much as under Labour, health spending has risen continuously, despite Mrs Thatcher and all she might have wished. But the Budget of November 1996 marked a change. The Tories have committed themselves to a real reduction in health spending that is to begin (officially) in 1998 but (practically) could be felt on the wards and in the surgeries by this autumn. In January Labour formally signed up to the plan, at least until April 1998. Perhaps it is no wonder health has been – to use Tony Blair's phrase – a "sleeping issue".

By that he could mean three things. The first is that the phoney election

campaign has so far proceeded without any shroud-waving. It was remarkable last week how new waiting-list statistics were, though politically embarrassing for the Conservatives, passed by without much loud Labour comment. Labour could flag up health deficiencies at any point it chose but – see below – it may well choose not to.

When he spoke at the weekend, Labour shadow Chris Smith fired a shot across the bows of all those NHS trust chairs who have been appointed on the whim of Conservative secretaries of state. He is entirely within his rights, and would have been even if he had not promised (rather vaguely) to advance the principle of merit by advertising such positions in the future. There is no need to be squeamish. The archipelago of appointed government, which includes those trust positions, is not suddenly going to sink out of sight after the election. Labour ministers will have posts to fill, and if they did not occasionally glance at the party affiliations of their appointees, well, they would be saints.

But if Mr Smith thinks this is relevant to health care or spending, he needs to think again. It is, in fact, almost as irrelevant as his grand promise to find £100m worth of transferable funds by delayering NHS bureaucracy. Come the election, we are going to see a mighty exercise in "badge engineering" as, for example, nurse-

managers are miraculously reclassified as nurse-practitioners without a single extra patient getting treatment. Mr Blair may mean that health is a sleeping issue in the sense that neither Mr Smith nor his predecessor Harriet Harman have come up with any compelling new formula for effective health management. The Thatcher-Clarke reforms – GP fundholding, the quasi-market – are neither pernicious nor notably efficacious. GP fundholding has, in a limited number of places, improved health care for patients; elsewhere there is, as yet, no evidence of its positive effects. Labour pro-

poses tinkering – a bit less market here, a bit more dirigisme there. Tinkering with NHS administration is what health secretaries do as a proof of their existence; provided it is not too ambitious it is probably relatively harmless. It does not substitute for fresh Labour ideas on health care. (It is one as pertinent in private sector systems such as the American as it is here.) Health costs are constantly pushed up by expensive new therapies, giving rise to questions about who deserves what treatment: are there any distributive principles on which patients, professionals and politicians can agree?

Mr Blair certainly means the NHS is a sleeping issue in that he has no wish, this side of the election, to tell home truths about spending. Labour has enough astute academics inside its tent; he certainly knows the score. Unless – starting at once – there is a huge break with the 3 per cent per year upwards trend in real-terms spending that has run fairly consistently for decades, Labour is set to preside over a growing gap between health demands and budgeted cash. That gap will, within 18 months, amount to some £5bn, enough to create quite a bit of political flak from doctors, nurses and patients, let alone all those local figures Chris Smith has indicated he wants to appoint to NHS trusts. (That is three pence on income tax, for those souls still living in the era before the Iron Shadow Chancellor.)

The question is not whether that long-run health spending trend should be broken – it probably ought to be, insofar as it is based on professional judgements shielded from external scrutiny. The fact is, it cannot be halted within the timetable to which Labour has acceded. In the longer term things look brighter; the financial consequences of demographic change for the NHS are not so dramatic after all. Labour's problem with health is short run. Health will stop "sleeping" as soon as the election is over and dawn breaks over those hospital beds. The Blair gov-

ernment could switch money into health, but that would mean deeper spending cuts elsewhere. Or else it means presiding over some kind of revolution in public health provision, smashing a spending consensus which even Mrs Thatcher ended up endorsing. To vote on health this spring looks like having to choose between competing claims for who is most likely to succeed in squaring circles.

How to stop spies walking

Espionage is still a serious business. It is hard, however, to be entirely focused about the annual shoe cupboard inspection for our spies which Tom King's oversight committee seemed to be recommending yesterday. Money, it said, is what turns agents these days, and for some – such as the CIA traitor Aldrich Ames – the money is needed to buy shoes. But the Government needs to think about money for intelligence staff. GCHQ, its own communications headquarters, is having difficulty recruiting specialists because its salaries are too low – and there are no unions to push pay up since they were expelled in the 1980s because they were somewhat subversive. It seems their absence may be a lot more dangerous to national security.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Parliament must rule on birth ethics

Sir: Heather Lawrence asks "Can it really be suggested that the rights of a fetus are greater than those of a child with a life threatening but curable medical complaint?" (Letters, 21 February). Talking of "rights" confuses the issue of whether the mother of a fetus which is about to be born and which is capable of living an independent existence owes a duty (whether to the fetus or society) which is proper justification for allowing doctors to perform a Caesarean operation without her consent, as in the Ms S case.

Whether or not such a duty is recognised is a matter for the courts but whether or not it should exist is a matter for Parliament. Undoubtedly very serious ethical issues are involved and judges should not be placed in the position of having to resolve them. Nine years ago Lord Justice Balcombe said: "It is intolerable to place a judge in the position of having to make such a decision without any guidance as to the principles upon which his decision should be based. If the law is to be extended... so as to impose control over the mother of an unborn child, then, under our system of parliamentary democracy, it is for Parliament to decide whether such control can be imposed and if so, under what limitations or conditions."

JOHN MITCHELL
Family Law Chambers,
Temple
London EC4

Sir: Was Rosalind Miles really serious when she stated that "even after four, six or eight children a mother does not have the experience of a junior houseman in his first week on an 'obs and gynae' ward"? ("The mother of all battlefields", 20 February).

I was a junior house officer in obstetrics and gynaecology for six months and I have rarely felt so embarrassed and uncomfortable as when a mother struggling in a labour in which I was supposedly assisting asked, "How many children do you have, doctor?". I may have known the dose of pain relief if she were to require it. I could only try to imagine what she was experiencing.

A good obstetrician or GP will always respect and listen to the woman's experience. Rosalind Miles' concern that we should be careful not to "rubish the knowledge bank of those who deliver babies all day every day" is misplaced. She and others should be careful not to rubish the instinctual and irreplaceable knowledge bank of mothers.

DR LESLEY MORRISON, MRCP,
DRCOG
London N19

Sir: As you report (leading article, 19 February), the fetus has no legal rights until born, so that an intervention intended to benefit the fetus is difficult to support legally against the mother's wishes.

At 36 weeks' gestation, the fetus in this case would probably not have needed any medical intervention once delivered, but if left inside a woman suffering fulminant pre-eclampsia might well have died. You compared this with parents refusing treatment for their child, when a court order to allow the treatment against the parents' wishes could be granted. It is difficult to understand the reasons for the special legal position of the



fetus. Why should one patient fully capable of independent life be legally different from another? Neither can voice their opinion and we must assume that both would want to live, taking advantage of medical intervention, as most rational adults do.

Much of our law revolves around the principle that no individual's action should harm another. Just because one individual is temporally receiving nutrients and oxygen inside another should not alter this, as long as it does not endanger the mother's life.

JONATHAN ROUND
St George's Hospital Medical School
London SW17

Sir: Ms S had over 30 weeks in which to make a decision about her, and her unborn child's, future. Sad as it seems to some of us, she could have decided to terminate the pregnancy. However, she chose not to do so.

She should not then be able to decide at a much later date to endanger the baby's life. Mothers (and I include pregnant women in that category) have responsibilities towards their children and in this sort of case it is right and proper that someone stands up for a child whose mother is unable or unwilling to fulfil her responsibilities.

ANNE YOUNG
Dumbarton
Strathclyde

Sir: Your report and leading article concerning the judicial review proceedings involving Ms S raise important issues.

However, on behalf of the approved social worker Louise Collins, who is employed by Merton Council, I wish to correct

some points. It is not correct that the section order made by the social worker was because of Ms S's refusal to accept treatment for pre-eclampsia. Louise Collins made the order under the Mental Health Act because, after lengthy discussion, she judged that Ms S was suffering from a mental disorder which needed further assessment.

Your leading article then states: "If S turns out to have been too seriously ill to give informed consent for medical treatment, then the actions of the courts, doctors and social workers will have been fair enough." The social worker played no part in the decision to carry out the Caesarean. Her involvement ended once the section order for further assessment had been made.

Finally, the leader states that refusing treatment that would save your or your baby's life seems crazy and not the behaviour of a normal mother. You add: "But this evidence is not enough to section a pregnant woman under the Mental Health Act."

You are, of course, correct, and our social worker was entirely aware of this.

Her decision was reached on better evidence than this and I would suggest it is better that we wait for the outcome of the case rather than prejudice the situation.

PETER WALTERS
Director of Housing and Social Services
London Borough of Merton
Morden, Surrey

Quality TV in the balance

Sir: Hamish McRae advances a possible, rather than probable future for the TV industry ("Tune in to the last of the dinosaurs", 19 February). In advancing the "magazine rack" model of the relationship between viewers and programme-makers, he is missing the point.

There is no doubt that technological advances will reduce production costs in some areas, but quality TV programming will still cost vastly more than the production costs of a magazine. There will, therefore, continue to be significant barriers to entry into this market that far outstrip those in the magazine trade.

For decades, the public has been used to getting very-high-quality programmes very cheaply. The "progress" that McRae envisages will result in this diet being replaced by cheaply made, low-quality content.

The real issue however, is the proven public demand for quality programming – for the diversity and pluralism only provided by public service broadcasting. Do we want existing public service broadcasters to be eliminated by the multi-channel process? Or are we to insist that the states of Europe continue to provide the framework that protects broadcasters who invest in quality programming?

We need continuing investment in original content. Should we

allow new channels to simply suck in imports? Or should we address the huge and growing deficit between the European Union and the United States that is killing our jobs and threatening the very basis of our future prosperity?

Finally, let us not forget our culture and social cohesion. Should the public have the right to see major national sporting events on free-to-air TV? Should they have the right to know that the emergency phone number is 999, and not 911 as some London schoolchildren now believe?

In adopting my report on Public Service Broadcasting in September 1996, the European Parliament not only demanded continuing support for public service broadcasting, it called upon the EU to enshrine such an obligation in the European treaties.

CAROLE TONGUE MEP
Socialist Group Co-ordinator on Media
Ifford, Essex

Martin Luther the anti-Semite

Sir: I find it odd that the Foreign Secretary, with his Jewish background, would choose to quote Martin Luther, who by today's standards was an anti-Semite ("From Shylock to the Scot Rifkind", 22 February).

I was baptised and confirmed in the Lutheran faith and have long been aware that Luther's Christian passion was offset by intemperate

remarks about Jews and others. He used words like a jackhammer, and it's no wonder that the eventual bull of excommunication against him began: "Arise, O Lord, and Judge thy cause. A wild boar has invaded thy vineyard."

Roland E Bainton, a Luther biographer, wrote that Luther, in describing his translation of the Bible into German, said: "I endeavoured to make Moses so German that no one would suspect he was a Jew." Late in his life Luther was even more abusive, according to Bainton, suggesting at one point that all Jews be deported to Palestine and that synagogues be burnt.

Among the most famous remarks attributed to Luther is that quoted by Malcolm Rifkind – "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise" – which he allegedly spoke when hauled before the Diet of Worms in April, 1521. Here I stand is also the title of Bainton's book, but he admitted there was no written record of Luther ever saying this at the hearing.

RONALD ODGERS
Carlton, North Yorkshire

Lane etiquette

Sir: I recently spent a lot of time driving through France, Belgium, Holland and Germany on business. Our European counterparts have a good sense of safety and etiquette. Having overtaken a vehicle, they pull into the nearside lane.

Why is it that an incredible number of car drivers in this country see it as their God-given right to sit in the middle lane of a motorway when the inside "slow" lane is completely clear?

P G RUSSELL-SMITH
London W13

UK is failing poor countries

Sir: Diane Coyle ("Wipe the slate clean for the world's poorest countries", 20 February) is right to encourage the Chancellor's efforts towards more generous debt relief to help the poorest nations "stand on their own feet", although – as Oxford, Christian Aid and others have said for years – it was the cost of our loans that helped to topple them in the first place.

But she seems less worried by the UK's fall in the OECD aid league table down to sixth lowest as a share of gross domestic product – below even the Netherlands if measured in quantity.

Scandinavians are much more aware of international affairs and the needs of poor countries than we are. Isn't it time that we paid more attention to our own development education and awareness, in schools and colleges as well as in Parliament?

The Earl of SANDWICH
House of Lords
London SW1

Sir: Sarah Helm's article on the Danes and immigration ("Immigrant song plays on Danish minds", 18 February) was incomplete, in that it failed to cover an important factor in the anxieties which Danes have about the immigration issue.

Denmark is one of a tiny number of nations which regularly meets the UN quota of 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product in foreign aid to the Third World. If economic circumstances were more favourable in those poorer countries from which immigrants uproot themselves to live in Europe, perhaps they would choose to stay at home and build up their own countries.

It is frustrating to be a country of five million people playing its part in world development when the larger and wealthier developed countries of Europe, and the United States, do not.

PETER NIELSEN
Worcester

Leave Scots out of Bridgewater

Sir: Rather than "British Justice" being in the dock in the Bridgewater case ("Bridgewater three to go free", 21 February) it is the English judicial system which must stand trial, for Scotland has an entirely different and separate legal system.

Under Scots law, such a miscarriage of justice could not have taken place, as convictions cannot be based on confessions alone – a practice that has since been incorporated within the English system.

Dr WINIFRED EWING MEP
President, Scottish National Party
Edinburgh

Safer bronzes

Sir: After six years working in Nigeria, visiting Benin Museum on many occasions has led me to believe that the Benin bronzes are in the best and safest place in the British Museum ("The looting of Benin", 22 February).

Does Bernie Grant really believe he would still be able to see the magnificent relics of Africa's noble past if they had been left in Benin? If they were returned, they would probably never be seen or heard of again.

CHRISTINE KELLY
Marlborough, Wiltshire

analysis

So who cares if the sky is falling?

Very few in the politically hamstrung world of science, despite last week's discovery of a celestial catastrophe 65 million years ago, says Oliver Morton

It happened 65 million years ago, and it could happen again. Something pretty big and moving extremely fast hit the earth very hard indeed. Waves to dwarf skyscrapers crisscrossed the oceans and swamped the land. An atmosphere that had caught fire rained acid. Tectonic spasms ran up the spines of the continents. Billions of tonnes of rock and mud were thrown into space, and as they re-entered the atmosphere, their heat set off fires around the world. The skies glowed dull red, then darkened to midnight black as an all but impenetrable pall of dust and smoke settled into the stratosphere. There was not another dawn for years.

The idea that an asteroid impact 65 million years ago killed off the dinosaurs and roughly three out of four other species then living is now firmly lodged in the scientific mind and the public imagination. The evidence for the impact is overwhelming. The huge crater it left has been discerned beneath thick sediments in Mexico, the mark of its tidal waves can be seen in the middle of America and its distinctive debris and ash has been found all over the world. The

death of the dinosaurs doesn't keep resurfacing because there is a hot debate or a lively controversy; it does so because it's just such a cracking story. New wrinkles to the tale, such as last week's announcement of evidence for centuries of near-sterility in the oceans following the impact, get media attention simply because astronomy, dinosaurs and mayhem are the ideal ingredients for popular science.

But our fascination isn't quite that simple. There's something more to it: the worrying implication, raised half jokingly by the Trevor MacDonalds and Sue MacGregors when the science correspondent has done his bit, that it could happen again. This catastrophe was not a one-off. There have been many asteroid impacts in the history of the earth; left unchecked, there will be many more.

These impacts could kill billions of people, and you could be one of them. The risk of your dying in such an event is around one in 30,000, which, though small, is far from insignificant. It's certainly far greater than the chances of your winning the lottery. Like the destruction of the dinosaurs, this risk has slipped into the popular imagination, lubricated by docu-

Collision course: the Earth faces disaster in a scene from the NBC mini-series 'Asteroids', which begins on ITV on Saturday 1 March

mentaries and magazine covers. We all know of it, and we could, scientific opinion assures us, easily and cheaply do something about it. But we don't. It's a mistake that, while unlikely to prove tragic, reveals a lot about how science is used and what science means.

The truth of the matter is straightforward. The solar system is not just a neatly concentric set of planets. There are lots of smaller lumps of ice and stone and iron whirling around the sun, too. They hit the earth all the time, and they come in a range of sizes, the big ones

proportionately rarer than the small. The vast majority are just pretty shooting stars – far too tiny to worry about. But watch these meteors for long enough and you will see some bigger ones. Watch for half a million years and you can expect to see one that outdoes a major nuclear war for nastiness, laying waste a continent, blacking out the sun for a year or more, blighting the world's crops.

If the risk of such an impact is 500,000 to one in a given year, then over a 70-year span, the cumulative risk to any individual of living through or dying in such an event is about one in 7,000. If such an impact leaves about 25 per cent of the earth's population dead, most of them through starvation, that gives any person a risk of about one in 30,000 during the course of an average lifetime. Some estimates make the risk smaller, and others make it larger, but that is a good average. It means that the huge unpleasantness of impacts offsets their great infrequency enough to make them roughly as dangerous as air travel, which entails a risk of about one in 20,000.

In the case of air travel, this is a level of risk people feel

quite strongly about. On 13 February, President Clinton set a goal of reducing the risk of dying in an air crash by 80 per cent. NASA, whose first A stands for aeronautics, and which thus has a thumb in the air-safety pie, will be spending about \$100m a year on the project. Most people thought this investment quite wise, but a scientist called David Morrison raised an inquiring eyebrow.

Morrison, who enjoys the wonderful title "director of space" at NASA's Ames Research Center in California, chaired a committee which produced a report in 1992 for the US Congress on the asteroid risk. Its advice was simple. There are probably a couple of thousand asteroids of the once-every-half-a-million-years, climatic-catastrophe type in earth-crossing orbits. Only a couple of hundred have been identified. Mount a thorough survey to find the rest of them, extrapolate their orbits for a few centuries in a computer, and see if one of them ever comes to occupy the same point in time and space as the earth.

If none of them is going to, that's good. And if one of them

is indeed on a collision course, that's not too bad, either. Once the risk moves from the statistical to the actual, things can be done about it, especially as the survey would typically give its warning decades or centuries in advance. A nuclear explosion off to one side of the incoming rock could nudge it into an orbit that missed the earth. The technology to fly spacecraft to asteroids exists, as do the bombs. Putting them together into a successful mission over a period of years would be a tricky problem, but far less tricky than, say, waging the Gulf War.

The Spaceguard survey that Morrison and his committee suggested as a way of finding almost all the asteroids was not a huge affair. It required six specially designed telescopes of modest size operating for three decades and a data system to handle what they saw. Its costs were estimated at about \$10m a year – a tenth of the price-tag for the air-safety programmes proposed two weeks ago and half a percent of NASA's budget for space science next year.

But NASA's big bucks, like those of its equivalents elsewhere, are fiercely fought over. They are spent on what the

agencies' bosses and their beneficiaries ask for. And no-one is asking for asteroid surveys except the people already doing them, who were well represented on Morrison's committee. The focus of modern astronomy is not on the objects nearest to the earth but on those furthest away: vast black holes at equally vast distances, infant galaxies half as old as time and the fading embers of the Big Bang itself. There is, admittedly, a very small space mission heading off to a nearby asteroid at the moment, but that probably owes more to prestige brought to bear by the senior senator for Maryland, where it was built, than to a widespread scientific constituency.

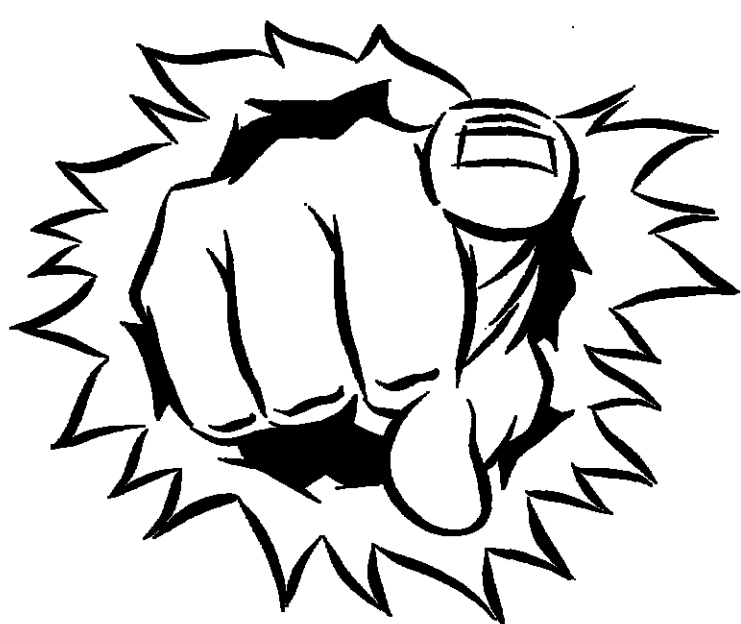
When the Spaceguard report was released, Morrison pointed out to the press that there were about as many people involved in full-time searches for dangerous asteroids as there were employed in a typical McDonald's. Since then, one new asteroid surveillance system has been started in the US, largely thanks to the interest of the military, some of whom see protection against asteroids as a reasonable mission, or an excuse to try out neat weapons

technology, or both. Other American searches, though, have closed down, as has the Australian programme, the only search that covered the southern skies. According to Duncan Steel, who used to work on the Australian search, there are now only about half a dozen people employed to track earth-crossing asteroids.

In short, nothing much is being done about the end of the world because it is a minority interest among scientists and no-one else feels particularly affected. For all that, asteroids are an otherworldly risk. They nicely highlight the worldliness of the relationship between science and policy. A theoretical danger can only be built into a policy-inducing risk with the help of a group of people who care about it, a constituency with a particular stake in the problem. Science simply doesn't matter much in policy debates unless there are interest groups to make use of it, lobbies with more clout than a burger-bar's worth of astronomers.

Then there's the problem of science going back on itself. People used to fear the skies, worry about Jove's thunderbolt and tremble at the sight of comets. Then the scientists took it on themselves to set the peasants right. The heavens were revealed as well-ordered clockwork, the history of the earth and life as one of slow gradual change rather than catastrophic fits and starts. By the middle of the 19th century, French astronomer Francois Arago was able to speak with pride of the fact that science had stopped people from worrying about comets, and that, as long as scaremongering journalists were assiduously slapped down, the sorry age of celestial superstition was gone for good. Science made the world seem sensible and its catastrophic demise silly. When science then comes back and says that the end of the world is, after all, a real possibility, it is not surprising that people laugh.

Sometimes, though, it's hard not to think that there is a deeper reason for "impact denial". Perhaps people do not want to see themselves connected to the universe in this sort of way. The geologists who for years resisted the impact explanation for the dinosaurs' death simply didn't want asteroids to play as big a role in the history of the earth as, say, the wanderings of one of its own tectonic plates. Tough – they do. Humans and the earth they live on are linked to the universe in all sorts of strange, indirect, unsettling ways. Worse yet, humanity now has the power to change these connections. We can empty seas and denude vast forests. We can warm an entire planet, and now, given just a little warning, we can push aside flying mountains. It's genuinely frightening to contemplate such power, especially when you realise how poorly decisions about using it are made or not made. Better to deny the risk of asteroid impact than to accept the fact the humans can redirect the stars in their courses. It's a delusion – a dangerous one, in this case – but you can understand it.



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Fantasy holidays with Ivanhoe & Co

For many years tourist authorities have had a touching belief that people will willingly spend their holidays in certain places for no other reason than that famous writers lived there. And the extraordinary thing is that it seems to be true. Americans do flock to Shakespeare's Stratford, British people flock to Wordsworth's Lakeland and Hardy's Wessex. I have met people who did go to John Fowles's Lyme Regis and James Herriot country and Dennis Potter's Forest of Dean and Dylan Thomas's Laugharne.

I have done it myself, if only by accident. I once had to do some research on the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway for a book on steam trains. This line at one point passes Haworth, the little old Yorkshire town where the little old Brontë sisters lived, and I trudged up Haworth main street to the parsonage where the blessed sisters lived and saw the pub where brother Branwell got drunk. The fact that I have never in my life read anything by the Brontës from start to finish did not deter me.

I do not suppose I was the only one. The only Brontë book I saw being read that day was in the hands of a Japanese student. But that's not the point. We don't worry much about our painters or composers – we certainly don't often plan our holidays round them – but we do have an instinctive reverence for our writers and their country – du Maurier's Bath, Dexter's Morse's Oxford, even Beethoven's suburbia – and are prepared to make a pilgrimage there. Or we were. Not any more. Not if the *Radio Times* "Holiday 97 Week 2" supplement is a true sign of the times. This little booklet has been hanging round since it made its initial bid for freedom by escaping from its mother magazine, and I thought for a while, whenever I glanced at it, that I must have kept it to help plan a holiday. Not so.

Rereading the cover I now realise I kept it to pinpoint a new holiday trend. Well, read it for yourself and see what you think. *Holiday 97*. Take the High Road to the home of Hamish



Miles Kington

Macbeth, Ivanhoe, and Doctor Finlay... Take to the high seas with the Archers... Plus how to track down the TV locations of *Bellykissangel*, *Cadfael*, *Rebecca*, *Wildfell Hall*... Do you spot what is different? That's right. The author has vanished. No mention of Scott or du Maurier, or whoever created Dr Finlay. Instead, you are invited to go to Scotland to visit the locations of Dr Finlay and Ivanhoe and Hamish Macbeth. Not where the authors lived. Not even where they set the books. But

where the books were filmed.

Did I say this is a new trend? In fact it's been going on for years. Where I live on the Wiltshire/Somerset border is where they shot *The Tiffield Thunderbolt* 30 years ago, and there's a pub up at nearby Dunkerton which has renamed itself "The Tiffield Thunderbolt" and people still come to nose around for the actual places used for filming. (At least, I assume they do. They can't all be opportunist house-burglars on a day out from Bristol, can they? Some of the more disreputable-looking ones must be railway film fans, surely...)

And what made the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway famous and profitable in the first place was not its position in Brontëland but its selection as the location for the film of *The Railway Children*.

Yet these were all straws in the wind compared to the present flood of pilgrimages-to-the-location. Nobody ever wrote a book called *The Shooting of the Tiffield Thunderbolt* along the lines of *The Making of Pride and Prejudice*. Nobody organised

trips to the stately homes where they shot *Kind Hearts and Coronets*. Yet now supplements are falling out of the *Radio Times* urging us in this post-Austen era to go to Scotland, because it is the home of Hamish Macbeth (not Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, notice) and of Ivanhoe.

Do you notice something else odd there? Ivanhoe is not a Scottish story. It was all about Normans and Saxons. Not a Scot in the lot of them. So in what sense is Scotland the home of Ivanhoe? Well, in the sense that author Sir Walter Scott lived, went bankrupt and died there, and you can still see his house. But that's not what the *Radio Times* is on about. The *Radio Times* doesn't want you to go to Abbotsford or Princes Street. It wants you to go where *Ivanhoe* was shot in Scotland, using Scottish clan extras: to places like Craigmillar Castle. Well, I've been to Craigmillar Castle, and let me tell you...

No more space today, alas. This sentence will be completed tomorrow, plus full details on how to visit the place where this column was penned.

Many hands have been tilting the balance of justice

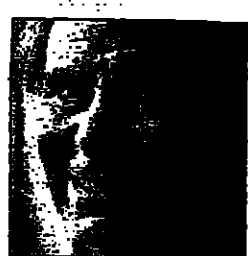
Miscarriages of justice are not simply the malign work of the police. If the problem were confined to police lies, police brutality and police corruption and the rest of the system of justice worked well, then it is doubtful whether any of the defendants in the Bridgewater case would have been convicted of murder or, if they had been, whether they would have stayed in prison for long. The same can be said of the other notorious miscarriages of justice in recent times: the Guildford Four, the Birmingham Six and the Stefan Kiszko case.

Let me name the other parts of the system. There are the courts themselves, in particular counsel for the prosecution. Prosecutors are subject to a pressure similar to that experienced by the police in high-profile cases. While the police sometimes feel compelled to make an arrest, any arrest, and put convincing evidence in front of court even if it has to be "improved", so prosecuting counsel likewise persuade themselves that they must obtain a conviction at all costs. While prosecutors do not do anything, they do something which has precisely the same effect.

They withhold items from the defence team which would tend to undermine their case. It is called by the police term "non-disclosure" and has been a feature of virtually all miscarriages. In the Bridgewater case the material that the defence never saw is said to include details of many interviews with the police made by the author of what we now know was a false confession. Nor were unidentified fingerprints on Carl Bridgewater's bicycle disclosed. When it is suggested to prosecuting counsel in such cases that they should disclose material which is quite as reprehensible as policy forgery, they invariably say that they faithfully followed court procedures. If they did, I say that the effect was to pervert such rules. Indeed, were it possible to review and to compare the sense of fairness of the criminal law as a whole, and the police as a whole, I would not expect to find any difference.

Then there is the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), which rarely brings prosecutions for conspiracy to pervert the course of justice against the police involved in miscarriages. No charges have been brought following the overturning of the Birmingham Six convictions, nor in relations to the Kiszko case. If you ask the CPS about this, you will be told piously that it was believed that the evidence was unlikely to secure a conviction, which is a perfect excuse since nobody else sees the files. CPS inaction or timidity is explained by a misguided desire to protect the system by hiding its shortcomings.

In every miscarriage of justice, the judges themselves also bear some responsibility. The Crown told the Court of Appeal last week that



Andreas Whittam Smith

The biases against impartiality within the British system need to be understood – they extend all the way to the top

the Bridgewater trial had been "fundamentally flawed". It can hardly be said that a judge who presides over a fundamentally flawed proceedings has done a good job. Even less can the three senior judges who heard an appeal in 1989-90 be exonerated. Much new evidence was produced pointing to the innocence of the convicted men. However, to disbelieve police witnesses has until recently been almost an impossibility for a judge; it is as dreadful a prospect as he or she can imagine, since it puts in doubt not only the case in hand but also every future case.

Almost as bad as this blindness was the way in which Paul Foot, the journalist who campaigned ceaselessly for the overturning of the conviction, Ann Whelan, mother of one of the prisoners, and Jim Nichol, her lawyer, were made to feel by the Appeal Court that they had in some way been at fault in daring to find witnesses and get evidence re-examined. It was implied that they had wrongly interfered with the sacred course of justice. The appeal was turned down. Mr Foot wants the judges to resign in shame. I would rather see the three judges come back into their court, where should be assembled the wrongly convicted men and their families, and wearing their red robes and their 18th-century wigs, bow low and solemnly apologise.

The Home Office and the Home Secretary of the day, too, are part of the system. At this time the Government has two reforms under way that beggar belief. In the first, Parliament will be asked to approve rules which limit the access to unused material by defence counsel in criminal cases unless it can be shown to be "relevant". How can defence counsel always know in advance what may be relevant or not? And in the second, a new code of practice would mean that evidence from police investigations is kept for only between one and three years. That rule would have meant that the Bridgewater miscarriage would never have been detected, as the evidence is nearly 20 years old. This is the work of a Home Secretary, Michael Howard, who believes that the existing system is not putting enough people behind bars and keeping them there.

What needs to be understood are the biases against justice within the British system. At the level of the police, it is the pressure sometimes felt to do doctor evidence. Prosecuting counsel can be subject to a macho will to win. The CPS dislikes prosecuting the very same police forces with which it works in daily partnership. The necessary aloofness of judges brings with it a crippling complacency.

Such distortions will ever be present, since they arise from the nature of the tasks being undertaken. It is the duty of the Home Secretary and Parliament to provide safeguards at each point. Of this aspect of his work Mr Howard has no understanding whatever.

The left that's left in New Labour

by Donald Macintyre

Tomorrow, Gordon Brown will set an inflation target at least as tough as the Government's own projection of 2.5 per cent. Although his speech will also lay out some important reforms of the Bank of England and the Treasury, once again this will be essentially from Shadow Chancellor Brown. We've had fiscally austere Gordon Brown, pledged to maintain for two years the awesomely difficult limits on public spending laid down by Kenneth Clarke. Now it's the turn of monetarily ultra-prudent Gordon Brown pledging Labour to a counter-inflation record at least as good as the Tories' now, and significantly better than they managed in the late Eighties.

While Brown will no doubt rightly emphasise that it's the poor who suffer most when governments lose their grip on inflation, this is a speech to reassure the City as much as the electors. And there is no point in pretending that all this won't make some in the Labour Party just a little uneasy. OK, we've pledged to constitutional reform, which has the great advantage to an incoming Labour government of not costing very much. But otherwise, just how are we going to be different from the Tories? Isn't it, they will ask once again, all a bit, well, bleak?

Which is why the arrival of two readable little books of unashamed New Labour propaganda ought to cheer up those in the party who from time to time suffer inner doubts about Tony Blair's own unshakeable conviction that a Labour government, especially if it can secure two terms, will be a good deal more radical than they fear. The first, *Why Vote Labour* by the MP Tony Wright, is one of a three-part series from Penguin, by a thinker in each of the three main parties, and brought out for the election. The other, much the more specific on policy, is *What Labour Can Do* by Richard Layard, which, as his fellow economist Guy Davies pointed out yesterday in *The Independent*, is a "very helpful" antidote to the idea that nothing can be achieved by a Labour government without increasing spending and borrowing. Some of it is party policy, some of it isn't. But it ranges from humane welfare



A healthier future for the NHS? Tony and Cherie Blair visit a hospital in the Wirral yesterday

Photograph: PA

The difference between the two parties is that Labour would plough savings back into the public sector



reform that rewards the working poor, through an extension of family credit, lower bottom rate taxes and a minimum wage of £3.25, to an education system that pulls up the lamest standards of the lowest-achieving schools, to the literacy programme announced by David Blunkett this week, to green taxes and a radical competition policy which has little patience with the notions of "national champions". And there is quite a lot more.

Layard's analysis, reinforced in recent lectures by both Brown himself and David Blunkett, demonstrates that neither equality (of opportunity) nor the role of the state have been abandoned by Tony Blair's Labour Party. It's true, of course, that revisionism about Labour's past comes thick and fast – whether it's Blunkett declaring in his recent last week that "any government entering the 20th century cannot hope to create a

more equal or egalitarian society simply by taking money from one set of people and redistributing it to others", or Margaret Beckett, one time left-wing firebrand, saying in a BBC TV interview on Sunday that she was "neither ruling in nor out" privatisations by a Labour government. What Layard's book, in particular, helps to demonstrate is how much room that leaves the left. Especially if you realise that the use of higher income tax for the well off or state ownership of trading industries were a means to an end, and not ends in themselves.

But as with equality, so with the role of the state. Not all Tories want to shrink the state. Sir Edward Heath's lofty dismissal of some of the dominant notions for all the protestations, by some of his less outspoken colleagues. But the centre of Tory gravity reflected, no doubt, in what will emerge in

the manifesto discussed by the Cabinet yesterday – is shifting inexorably towards progressive reduction below the 40 per cent share of GDP that the state takes. What's refreshing about Layard is how relaxed he is about keeping a level that is not much higher than 40 per cent, but is not much lower, either.

Not that this won't mean some real pain for some. The windfall tax belies the notion that Labour's programme is an Arthur-Daley, nobody-gets-hurt kind of politics. And welfare reform, as Layard implies, means a transfer of some benefits, such as top-up pensions, to well-regulated private insurance. In time a new system of student maintenance loans may be augmented by starting the erosion of state-paid university tuition fees – which for the well off is little short of a scam. But the difference between the two main parties is that there is every reason to expect the sav-

ings to be ploughed back by Labour into other parts of the public sector, such as health and, above all, an education system that starts to provide equality of opportunity.

Tony Wright quotes approvingly the remark that services that are only for the poor end up as being poor services. This is a critical difference between new Toryism and New Labour. In the NHS it will mean halting the flight by the prosperous from a health service that Nigel Lawson, no less, regarded as one of the most efficient deliverers in the developed world. The same goes for education. Wright quotes, again approvingly, but without endorsing his prescription of reintegrating the best of the private sector in the state system, George Walden's condemnation of an "apartheid" in which 7 per cent of children in private schools collect "80 per cent of the GCSE and A-level league table prizes".

None of this would happen overnight; much of it, perhaps not even in the first term. But here's the point: Labour cynics talk easily about Tony Blair having got "his betrayal in first". That's one way of describing it; another may be that Blair, as Margaret Thatcher very differently did in 1979, will deliver more than he promises.

Towards genuine consent in Ulster

Parity of esteem for both communities deserves to be more than a theory, says Marjorie Mowlam

In our policies for Northern Ireland, as in all other areas, Labour will apply the principle of fairness not favours. In the vernacular of Northern Ireland politics that means affording each community, unionist and nationalist, "parity of esteem". The focus is on the need for members of both nationalist and unionist traditions to feel that their rights and identities are fully respected.

In Northern Ireland, granting respect to one community is often seen as taking it away from the other. This is a dangerous zero-sum game. It is the duty of politicians from Britain, Ireland and Northern Ireland to break out of it. The ending of the IRA ceasefire and on top of that the events last summer at Drumcree have entrenched attitudes within the communities, so it is essential to be proactive in rebuilding trust and confidence.

The Downing Street declaration signed in 1993 achieved parity of esteem at the level of ideas. It offered to the nationalists a recognition that the people of Ireland alone have the right to self-determination. And it offered Unionists the guarantee that any exercise of self-determination would be subject to the consent of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland. As Tony Blair said recently, this approach and the principle of consent has now been accepted by all parties in Britain, Ireland and Northern Ireland, with the exception of Sinn Féin.

Parity of esteem is as much about the low art of day-to-day

politics as it is about the high politics of a negotiated peace settlement. It is at heart about building confidence between the communities. This is often talked about, but flesh is seldom put on the bones. We have plans to do that. That is why Labour will incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into law in Britain and Northern Ireland. Of course the question of rights – especially minority and community rights – is not undisputed in Northern Ireland. That is why we will continue to consult with the parties in the talks on developing a local bill of rights. But the convention as a basic framework has wide support in both communities and offers us a way to proceed.

There are serious problems with community support for policing in parts of Northern Ireland. As well as negotiation between the Northern Ireland parties on the issue, political action is necessary in Westminster to improve the openness and accountability of the police and to ensure that it reflects both communities more accurately. Recent reports by the UK police inspectorate and a senior former Northern Ireland civil servant have pointed to weaknesses in the system. Labour is examining the recommendations of these reports alongside its own proposals.

Religious discrimination in employment in Northern Ireland is a blatant symbol of unfairness. The Fair Employment Act exists to help combat it, but more needs to be done. As a first step, we must reconsider the effectiveness of exist-



Confrontation: Orangemen march through the nationalist Ormeau Road area of Belfast

Peter MacDiarmid

ing policies. In the public sector, for example, we intend to make it a statutory duty for government bodies to take equality of opportunity into account through more rigorous enforcement of the Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment guidelines.

Nothing reveals better the absence of trust and confidence and the dangers of playing zero-sum games than the issue of parades and marches. The appalling events at Drumcree last year drove the Government to set up a review (which Labour has called for since 1995). But when its findings were published last month, the Government

announced a further period of consultation. What they hoped to learn in just eight weeks that the independent reviewers did not pick up in five months of written and oral evidence wasn't – and still isn't – clear.

I have recently met groups on both sides living on or near two of the most disputed routes – the Garvaghy Road in Portadown and the Ormeau Road in Belfast. Both groups were concerned that what happened last year should not happen again. Labour is committed to uphold the rule of law, implement the recommendations in the report, and to do all it can to

help mediate and resolve disputes through agreement.

The lack of local input into decision making is a problem for both communities. Direct rule from Westminster is far from ideal and that is why Labour wants to see a new agreement for Northern Ireland, including a devolved assembly elected by proportional representation and designed to allow both communities to work together and share power in the interests of all the people.

There are good indications of that happening on the ground in some areas now – in some district councils and in the local partnerships put together to distribute a block of European Union funding. It is a practice we will support and encourage. And we will introduce measures to make the many quangos that administer policy in Northern Ireland more open and representative of both communities.

Labour and the Tories both accept the constitutional principle that a devolved assembly can exist in Northern Ireland without threatening the integrity of the union with Britain. But the plain fact is that Northern Ireland as distinct political circumstances and that new constitutional arrangements need the support of both communities living there to work. This means that practical and mutually beneficial cross-border co-operation and improved working relations between Westminster and Dublin must be integral parts of a comprehensive settlement. Building trust in the devel-

oping North-South and Dublin-London relationships is essential too. That means more openness, for example, in the workings of the Anglo Irish Agreement and its mechanisms. I do not see why local people and their representatives should not be more openly consulted on what is discussed between the two governments when they meet. This is not a matter of ideology but a practical part of the process of building local political support for the work of the two governments.

The theory of the peace process has been developed over a long period, often at the inter-governmental level. The current phase – perhaps the most difficult – is the practical politics of reaching local agreement. Disillusionment with the current talks process is widespread. There has not been the substantive progress we hoped for last June. Pressures on the parties in the talks are mounting and the uncertainty created by the impending general election doesn't help.

A new government will want to bring new impetus into that process, but couldn't just compel the participants to talk. Trust and confidence between the parties and the communities they represent has to grow to enable real progress to be made. We cannot contract all the years of suspicion and distrust overnight, but there is a lot we can do based on Labour principles of fairness and justice. The people of Northern Ireland deserve nothing less.

The writer is shadow Northern Ireland Secretary.

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US pair shrug off windfall threat with £1.5bn Yorkshire bid

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

Two US power companies admitted they would have no problem affording Labour's planned windfall tax on the privatised utilities yesterday as they launched a joint agreed £1.5bn takeover bid for Yorkshire Electricity.

The offer leaves Southern Electric as the last of 12 privatised regional electricity com-

panies (RECs) neither taken over nor facing a bid. If the two US companies, AEP of Ohio and Public Service Colorado from Denver, gain control of Yorkshire, it will leave a total of seven RECs in American hands. The others are: North-east; South; East Midlands; South-east; and Scotland.

Embarrassment at the latest foreign takeover approach spilled over into the Commons yesterday, with Michael Hes-

elgrave, Deputy Prime Minister, calling on other countries to allow outside bids for their utilities. He said he was "constantly urging the US and other countries to have open economies".

The Government is also likely to be on the defensive over the two bidders' reaction to Labour's proposed windfall tax. Linn Draper, AEP's chairman, said the US companies had examined various assumptions for the cost of the tax and

had concluded they could afford it. He explained: "We wouldn't have made a bid if we didn't have a good example of the size." The comments were welcomed by John Battle, Labour's energy spokesman: "This just goes to show it's not the problem the Tories make it out to be."

The windfall tax bill would come on top of a possible £30m which Yorkshire said it may be forced to pay back to its pensions scheme following a re-

cent landmark ruling against National Grid by the Pensions Ombudsman.

Shares in both Yorkshire and Southern surged on yesterday's bid news. AEP and PS Colorado are jointly offering 927p a share for Yorkshire, 13.3 per cent above Friday's closing price of 818.5p. Yorkshire shares rose to 882p, a rise of just 7 per cent, reflecting some uncertainty over whether the bid would be referred to the Monopolies and

Mergers Commission. Southern Electric gained 23.5p to 770p.

Christopher Hampson, Yorkshire's non-executive chairman said the offer was "very full and fair". He continued: "We held out for a good price. We didn't accept the price that they offered at first... it was a hell of a lot less than they're offering now."

Analysts dampened speculation of a rival bidder appearing with a higher offer.

Sources close to PowerGen, the privatised generator, played down the possibility that it would bid for Yorkshire. PowerGen was blocked by the Government from buying Midlands Electricity last year but is thought to have been examining another bid for a REC should Labour win the next election.

The two US utilities said this was the first time they had made a joint bid, but had been eyeing UK utilities for several

months. AEP and PS Colorado have a combined market value of \$10.3bn (£6.2bn) and supply 4 million customers. They said 25 per cent of the £1.5bn purchase price for Yorkshire would be financed by equity with the rest from debt.

They hinted yesterday at a more aggressive approach towards the UK gas and electricity markets after domestic competition takes hold next year. Comment, page 17

Building societies: Members endorse conversion plans ■ A&L sets flotation date ■ Leeds and Skipton vow to remain mutuals

Green light for £12bn Halifax stock flotation

John Treanor
Banking Correspondent

Halifax Building Society's £12bn flotation is firmly on track after the vast majority of its 9 million members voted in favour of its conversion to a bank, clearing the way for share pay outs worth an average of £1,300 to individuals in June.

The vote at the special general meeting held at the Sheffield Arena was virtually unanimous, however, as Jon Foulds, chairman of Halifax, said the resolution to convert to a bank had already been passed by postal votes.

"This won't be the biggest exercise in democracy this year, but it will be the second-biggest," Mike Blackburn, chief executive of the society, said.

Some 5.15 million of the society's 6.9 million investing members voted for the plan while just 110,000 voted against. The total number of votes cast in favour was significantly more than the 3.3 million needed to approve the conversion plans.

Just 1,090 members struggled through the key wind to the Sheffield Arena. Despite the low turnout, members heard passionate speeches pitched against the conversion plans.

Leo Westhead from Scarborough said: "The success of this resolution will represent the triumph of selfish, short-term individualism over collective community concern. To my mind it is an act of social vandalism."

Mr Foulds responded: "I think the Halifax has outgrown

mutualism." He received the surprise support of John Spalding, a former chief executive of Halifax. Speaking from the floor, Mr Spalding sympathised with those members of the society who had spoken so passionately in favour of mutualism.

But, he said, it was "quite clear that the day of the great Two medium-sized building societies, Leeds & Holbeck and Skipton, yesterday pledged to remain mutual as they announced increases in profit. Leeds & Holbeck made £8.27m before tax last year, an increase of more than £4m. Skipton made £31.76m, against £27.23m in 1995.

Ian Ward, chief executive of Leeds & Holbeck, said the society planned to remain a leading independent building society as it believed this was in the best long-term interests of its borrowing and investing members. He added that the cost income ratio of 39.8 per cent and cost to asset ratio of 0.86 per cent were lower than almost all other banks and building societies.

national building society was over. Some of the 30 or so speakers from the floor at the two-and-a-half hour meeting had made long journeys. Professor Jacob Ziegler had travelled from Toronto to complain he was unable to receive his distribution of shares because of Canada's legal regulations.

Mr Foulds told him he had the option of using a registered

address in the UK but Professor Ziegler pointed out that this may have tax implications for members like him who reside abroad. Around 70,000 members live overseas, of whom 30,000 live in North America and are also unable to receive free shares.

Serge Lourie, who has led the Halifax Action Group, reminded Mr Foulds of his words in an interview in 1994 in which he said he was convinced of the benefit of mutualism. The annual report of Halifax that year recorded the merits of mutualism too, Mr Lourie said.

"We believe the conversion process has been fundamentally flawed. The transfer document is biased and does not give the arguments against becoming a bank," he said, pointing to the lower borrowing rates and higher savings rates offered by building societies compared to banks.

The meeting also heard concerns about disabled members who may be losing out because their accounts are held in trust. While a Bill sponsored by Douglas French, Conservative MP, will rectify this issue for societies announcing conversion plans in the future it will have come too late for Halifax members.

Just over 4 million will receive the minimum allocation of 300 free shares.

The rest will receive this, plus an additional hand out of up to 981 shares depending on the balance of their accounts on 25 November 1994 and 24 February 1997.



The eyes have it: Jon Foulds, chairman (right), and Mike Blackburn, chief executive of the Halifax Building Society, preparing for the members' vote at a special meeting in Sheffield yesterday. Photograph: John Voos

Alliance suffers in price war

Peter Rodgers
Financial Editor

Alliance & Leicester spent nearly £50m on mortgage cash-backs and discounts to attract new business last year, but competition was so intense that its market share in 1996 still plunged 40 per cent.

The society, which announced that its stock market flotation was provisionally set for 21 April, spent a total of £143m on all forms of mortgage incentives during the year.

But roughly two-thirds of this was the continuing cost of mort-

gage deals agreed in previous years where the discounts were still in force. The balance was the cost of cash-backs and discounts required to win new business during the 1996 price war.

A&L said it had chosen not to follow the very aggressive pricing adopted by many competitors in the first half of the year, "preferring to maintain profitability rather than buy market share". Gross mortgage lending for 1996 fell from £2.9bn to £2.2bn in a growing market.

However by the fourth quarter the price war had eased and A&L's market share began to re-

cover. For the year as a whole it averaged 3.1 per cent but in the fourth quarter it rose to 3.5 per cent. This compares with 5.2 per cent for the whole of 1995.

A&L's policy is to write off the cost of discounts over the period of which they are in force, rather than the policy of some other societies of spreading them over the average life of a mortgage. Peter White, the chief executive, said this was "prudent" compared with many other UK mortgage lenders.

Analysts believe the planned conversion to a bank will bring a windfall of approaching

£1,100 each to members. The society said the conversion project cost £26m in administrative expenses during 1996.

This cost includes transfer documents for more than 3 million members, and the expenses of the meeting in December at which members approved the proposal. There was also a supplementary depreciation charge on property of £27m.

Profit before tax was £306m, a rise of 6 per cent, but the underlying change before conversion costs and other exceptional items was a 10 per cent rise to £359m operating profit.

New-look GUS gets finance director

Nigel Cope

Great Universal Stores appointed its first finance director in a decade yesterday as new chairman Lord Wolfson continued his shake-up of the mail order group.

The new man is David Tyler, 44, who joins from Christie's International. Mr Tyler had been finance director at the auction house since 1989 after spells with Unilever and County NatWest.

GUS's last finance director, Trevor Spittle left in 1987. Since then the £6.8bn company, which also owns Burberry and Scoll House, has had no designated finance director on its 12-strong board. It is almost certainly the only FT-SE100 company that has felt it could do without such a function.

It is understood that prior to his move to the honorary presidency last year, the former chairman Lord Wolfson of Marylebone used to fulfil the finance function.

But with GUS becoming more active in the corporate arena following last year's £7bn acquisition of Experian, the US data company, a more traditional board structure has become more appropriate.

"The company didn't have a finance director but Lord Wolfson decided it was time they had one," GUS said yesterday.

There were two other boardroom appointments at GUS yesterday. Also of key significance is David Bury, 54, who becomes commercial director and treasurer after joining GUS in April. He will have a roving brief at executive level with responsibility for strategy. It is also likely that he will play a key role in acquisitions. Louise Patten, 43, a former partner at Bain & Co, the strategy consultants joins as a non-executive director.

EMU means 'equity boom and forex job cuts'

Yvette Cooper

A report on the implications for the financial markets of a single currency launched yesterday by Reuters news agency claimed that the outlook for equities was "unambiguously bullish".

"Job cuts are inevitable in the forex market... and there are sharp differences of opinion on whether European monetary union will give birth to a bond market to rival US treasuries, or just kill the volatility that now enlivens European bond trading," Reuters said.

The report, "EMU Explained: Markets and Monetary Union", says that in the short term, London should not be disadvantaged if the UK stays outside EMU.

Andre Villeneuve, a Reuters director, said yesterday: "Even if the UK stays out of a single currency, the City of London will be in a see no evidence that London will be disadvantaged in the short term." However,

Reuters suggests that in the long term, if the UK stays out, Frankfurt in particular will be well placed to play a stronger role.

European equity markets are expected to expand whatever happens to EMU. The report says: "Tens of millions of Europeans are about to be swept up in an investment rev-

olution. Momentum is already building for a transformation of the European savings industry and monetary union could give the process a final decisive push."

The pressure to expand privately funded pension schemes is growing as ageing European populations make current public pension provision increasingly unsustainable. At the same time, EMU will remove currency risk and encourage cross-border investment with new funds.

Foreign exchange dealers, on the other hand, have less to look forward to, according to Reuters - especially those speculating between European currencies. In the run-up to

EMU they can indulge in a last blast of glorious speculation, betting on who will join the single currency, and testing the resolve of politicians and central bankers. But after that, the volume of currency trading will fall, putting pressure on jobs.

In the long term, trading in Asian currencies could fill the gap left by the euro, Reuters believes.

Prospects for the bond market remain harder to predict, according to the report. Betting on the convergence of European interest rates in the run-up to monetary union has been a lucrative business.

Without that, the report says, "European analysts acknowledge that Europe's vibrant government bond markets risk losing much of their excitement."

But bond traders could instead start to bet on future entrants to EMU, such as Hungary, or on whether governments are fudging the Maastricht criteria. Financial markets would also be affected by the more fundamental questions about the strength of the euro: prospects for European inflation and the sustainability of the union.

Should EMU unravel, Mr Villeneuve predicts a different financial future for Europe: "Foreign exchange dealers would have to start hiring fast. There would be a lot of volatility in the currency markets."

Comment, page 17

Mark rises on rumours of convergence delay

Rumours that EMU might be delayed sent the mark rising against the dollar yesterday. Meanwhile international investors continued to move away from bonds affected by EMU uncertainty, and into US bonds and UK gilts which have been less affected by EMU speculation.

The mark rose to its highest level against the dollar in two weeks amid worries about European monetary union. The dollar fell to DM1.67 compared to Friday's close of DM1.688.

The prospect of delays to EMU reduces the likelihood of a broad-based EMU encompassing the weaker lira and peseta as

well as the mark at an early date, and so raises traders' confidence in the mark.

Meanwhile analysts claimed that investors were switching funds away from bonds which had been heavily affected by EMU speculation and into gilts instead.

"We're advising switching out of Spain into the US, and out of Italy into the UK," said Phyllis Reed, European bond strategist at BZW in London.

Speculation that the starting date for EMU might be delayed was provoked by a poll in Germany's weekly news magazine Der Spiegel on Sunday, showing 77 per cent of Germans favoured a delay to EMU. At

the same time, a report in another German magazine, Focus, claimed the German finance ministry expected the country's national debt to rise this year to 61.5 per cent of GDP from 60.5 per cent last year, above the Maastricht ceiling of 60 per cent.

If Germany cannot meet the Maastricht criteria, it will make it far more difficult for EMU to go ahead without countries such as Italy, which may also miss the criteria only by a small amount. Analysts suspect that Germany will push for a delay in EMU rather than go ahead on a fudged basis with Italy as part of the first wave.

Comment, page 17

STOCK MARKETS									
Index	Close	Day's change	Change (%)	1996/97 High	1996/97 Low	Yield (%)	Index	Close	Day's change
FTSE 100	4331.10	-5.70	-0.1	4357.40	3632.30	3.82	Nikkei	14000	+100
FTSE 250	4641.90	+10.90	+0.2	4641.90	4015.30	3.39	Dow Jones	7900	+100
FTSE 350	2141.60	-1.20	-0.1	2150.60	1816.60	3.57	Hang Seng	10000	+100
FTSE SmallCap	2349.42	+1.86	+0.1	2350.55	1954.08	2.90	Taipei	10000	+100
FTSE All-Share	2114.52	-0.93	-0.0	2122.75	1791.95	3.52	Hong Kong	10000	+100
New York	6977.80	+46.18	+0.7	7087.45	5032.94	1.94	Frankfurt	10000	+100
Tokyo	18856.99	-137.55	-0.7	22696.80	17303.05	0.851			
London	13375.69	-68.16	-0.5	13868.24	10204.87	3.187			
Frankfurt	3184.21	+0.12	+0.0	3276.16	2253.36	1.511			

Source: FT Information

INTEREST RATES									
Instrument	Rate	1 Month	3 Month	6 Month	1 Year	2 Year	3 Year	5 Year	10 Year
UK sterling	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
US long bond	5.51	5.51	5.51	5.51	5.51	5.51	5.51	5.51	5.51
Japan	0.43	0.43	0.43	0.43	0.43	0.43	0.43	0.43	0.43
Germany	3.19	3.19	3.19	3.19	3.19	3.19	3.19	3.19	3.19

CURRENCIES									
Pair	Yesterday	Change	Year Ago	Pair	Yesterday	Change	Year Ago	Pair	Yesterday
\$/£	1.6335	+1.43c	1.5404	£/DM	0.5122	-0.54	0.6492	\$/¥	164.4
\$/N.Y.	1.6025	-0.185c	1.5415	DM/£	0.6240	+0.64	0.6492	¥/£	164.4
DM/£	2.7274	+0.22c	2.2355	DM/¥	1.6897	-1.34pt	1.4513	£/¥	164.4
¥/£	199.248	+0.388	181.544	¥/DM	121.975	-0.833	104.875	£/DM	164.4
£/Index	97.7	+0.3	88.3	Index	103.0	-0.8	95.1	Index	103.0

OTHER INDICATORS									
Indicator	Yesterday	Day's change	Year Ago	Indicator	Yesterday	Day's change	Year Ago	Indicator	Yesterday
Oil Brent \$	19.64	-0.24	17.82	RPI	154.4	-146.0	13 Mar	Base Rate	6.75
Gold \$	392.75	-0.6	398.30	GDP	109.7	+2.66c	107.0	25 Apr	
Gold £	215.95	-2.28	258.57						

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Does New Labour have an old view on RECs?

COMMENT

Gordon Brown may have trouble demonstrating the legality of the windfall profit tax in Westminster or Brussels but successive posers of Americans with bulging wallets have demolished the myth that the utilities cannot afford it

There's just a possibility, if only a remote one, that the decision on whether to refer the latest American bid for a regional electricity company to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, will fall to a Labour government. If it does, it will be an interesting test, for when the first of these bids came rolling across the Atlantic a little under two years ago, Labour's knee-jerk reaction was to say that the thing must be referred at all costs.

Very Old Labour. These days and with power now within its grasp, attitudes seem to be a little more sanguine. "It seems a bit stupid to refer this bid as there are hardly any RECs left. The time for referral was when all this process started," says John Battle, energy spokesman. So what if Labour did have to decide? What would it do? If the bid comes from the US, the policy seems to be clear: "We are not opposed in principle to foreign takeovers," reiterates Mr Battle.

As well he might, for the Americans were positively falling over themselves yesterday to say that Labour's windfall profit tax presented no kind of obstacle and had been fully factored into the bid calculations. Gordon Brown may have trouble demonstrating the legality of the tax in Westminster or Brussels, but successive posers of Americans with bulging wallets have comprehensively demolished the myth that the utilities cannot afford it.

AEP and PS Colorado brushed the issue aside like a fly bothering a horse in the Ohio sun. As proposed - a one-off levy of £3.5bn widely spread among the utilities - would not

be a problem, they said. This is a bit of an embarrassment for Labour, for the Americans seem a good deal more relaxed about the tax than the Brits, whose position Labour's policy of referral would have protected.

Still, never mind. It looks as if timing will spare Labour the discomfort of having to make the decision. With every possibility that Southern Electric will have been snuffed up by the time of the election too, Labour's scope for doing much with this industry beyond the windfall profits tax and tampering with price regulation looks severely limited. As for a clear statement of policy on mergers, we are still waiting...

Defence rivals are missing an opportunity

That long-mooted merger between GEC and British Aerospace is the longest on again and off again story in British industry. What was billed in a Sunday paper at the weekend as a new round of talks about to begin turns out to have been an old round on the point of failure. The market yawned and the two share prices hardly moved.

All the same, this is a serious issue that will not go away. The rapid consolidation in the US aerospace and avionics industry is bound to put heavy pressure on European rivals with the Americans turning increasingly to export markets for relief from vicious home-market cutbacks.

It so happens that the UK has not done too badly as a defence exporter, to a great extent as the result of its successes in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Middle East. Exports of helicopters and aircraft to Germany and America are also generating substantial income. As a result, the UK was the second largest defence exporter in the world last year with approximately a quarter of the global arms markets.

Whether a merger of GEC and British Aerospace, or perhaps of the defence avionics businesses of the two companies, would make much difference to this record is an interesting question. There would certainly be cost cutting, which would be reflected quickly in jobs and profits. But there might also be upward pressure on prices charged to the Ministry of Defence by a single dominant supplier. Nor on present form is it obvious that a reduction in competition would improve the performance of the British defence industry overseas.

Gobbling up national competitors should not be the main priority of this industry. The chief issue remains the insular, fragmented and national nature of the defence market in Europe, an enormous defence market which is excluded from the provisions of the European Union single market. Individual governments still treat their defence companies like nationalised industries. As the power of the American giants grows, an enormous opportunity is being missed. Look at the way the French are battling

to produce a new national champion through a merger of Aerospatiale and Dassault and how they are determined to keep the privatisation of Thomson CSF in French hands. Common sense says that integration in the European defence industry should be cross-border to make real gains, giving companies access to the wider European market. That is the target GEC and British Aerospace should aim at. A domestic merger within the UK is a sideshow and a distraction from the more important agenda.

Just a bout of Euro-pessimism

Anybody who follows closely the ebb and flow of debate over European monetary union will have known of Wilhelm Nölling's views long before he graced a British Sunday newspaper with an account of his plan to use Germany's constitutional court to block the country's membership of the single currency. Not only had newswires and Continental newspapers been running stories about the threat all week. But Mr Nölling, a former Bundesbank council member turned academic, is also a known Eurosceptic.

Not surprisingly, some Germans - and he is one - are opposed to the single currency. Every time one opens his mouth, the predominantly Eurosceptic British press seizes on it with evident glee. Why even the Ger-

mans think it's crazy, it can be said, and so the impression deepens that the whole thing is in trouble and probably won't happen.

That may be the ultimate outcome, but for the time being it would be foolish to bet on it. Every day brings a raft of speeches and statements about the single currency, few of which advance the sum of human knowledge very much. Each one is nonetheless used by financial markets as another trading opportunity.

So there is a new mood in the markets this week, partly because of the Nölling effect, partly because of rumours that the Bundesbank has had a row with a leading candidate to run the European Central Bank, Wim Duisenberg. After a bout of euphoria about prospects for the single currency going ahead on time, the markets are having a bout of Euro-pessimism. Traders will for the moment believe any old rumour about in-fighting and obstacles.

In truth, it is far too early to say what is going to happen one way or the other. It is more than a year before the decision on whether to postpone the start of the single currency needs to be taken. No politician has ever taken a tough decision 12 months ahead of schedule.

The financial markets will probably go through the cycle of over-optimism and over-pessimism at least once or twice more before spring 1998. By then, the outlook might be very different; the French and German economies could be expanding fast and unemployment falling.

Thorn to axe 360 at rentals division

Nigel Cope

Thorn, the troubled retailer, is to close 90 branches of its Radio Rentals chain and cut 360 jobs in an effort to improve efficiency. The company, which has been dogged by poor trading and a sliding share price since its demerger from Thorn EMI last August, is also restructuring its central support functions in the UK to cut costs.

In America it is introducing several promotional schemes designed to improve sales and encourage customer loyalty.

The action came as speculation mounted in the City regarding possible management changes at Thorn following the company's disappointing performance. The shares have halved since the demerger and were hit hard by a profits warning last month.

Michael Metcalf, the chief executive, was not available for comment yesterday but some analysts said changes were likely. One analyst said: "Giv-

ing what has happened, it would hardly be surprising if heads were to roll." The company said it had received no pressure from investors for a boardroom shake-up.

Thorn said the UK store closures would involve a £10m charge against this year's profits but would then yield savings of £6m a year. The stores earmarked for closure are the smaller, underperforming branches that are in poor retail locations. The 90 stores account for 15 per cent of all Radio Rentals outlets but generate 7 per cent of sales. "The stores were only operating at half-efficiency," Thorn said.

The City responded positively to the changes, marking Thorn shares nearly 10 per cent higher to 203p.

Though analysts predict further store closures at Radio Rentals, Thorn plans to continue to roll out its Crazy George's format and should have about 60 stores in operation by the end of the year.

In the US, Thorn is to woo rental customers with a series of promotions that offer rewards for loyalty. Under one of the offers, called "6/50", customers who remain loyal for more than six months on a rental contract receive a 50 per cent discount for the remainder of the agreement.

"We have a high churn rate in the US and we are hoping to increase customer numbers and lock them in," said Thorn's spokesman Jim Donovan.

The company is also improving the support structure in the US by merging the field sales teams of two divisions, Rent-a-Centre and Remco.

The changes were announced alongside Thorn's third-quarter profits figures which showed an 8 per cent increase in pre-tax profits to £123m for the nine months to 31 December. It said fourth-quarter performance would be affected by the third-quarter trading figures, and the strength of sterling.

Investment column, page 18



Under a cloud: Poor trading has prompted 90 branch closures in the Radio Rentals chain

Debt standstill on Tunnel extended

Peter Rodgers

Eurotunnel said yesterday it had reached agreement with its banks on a nine-month extension of a standstill agreement covering £8bn of debts.

The extension, from 14 March to 14 December, is to take account of delays caused by last year's fire. But the company said the extra time did not signal problems in the bank negotiations over a financial reconstruction. The delay was necessary because Eurotunnel had put off the shareholder meeting to approve the plan from April to the end of June.

Patrick Ponsolle, co-chairman of the company, announced last month that he did not want to put the plan to shareholders until after fire damage to the tunnel had been repaired and Le Shuttle freight services had resumed.

Eurotunnel said it expected

to agree the details of the financial reconstruction in time for shareholders to vote. The 225 banks agreed the extension of the standstill last Friday.

The company announced an 18-month debt standstill in September 1995 and this would have ended on 14 March without the extension, which required a vote of 65 per cent or more of the lenders by value to approve. Eurotunnel declined to say what the actual vote was.

The terms of the restructuring, agreed in principle last October with a steering committee of banks, must be fixed by the end of March so that a prospectus can be sent out in the first two weeks of April, to allow shareholders to vote on the package by 30 June.

A Eurotunnel spokeswoman said: "Working parties are studying the details of the various financial instruments and fixing the parameters."

Confidence paves way for 1,100 new jobs

Clifford German

Rising consumer confidence and increased high street spending are helping to create almost 1,100 jobs at Whitbread, Gowings, and Index.

Whitbread, the brewing, pubs and restaurants company, plans to create 300 new jobs by opening 35 more Costa Coffee stores over the next 12 months, mainly in and around London. New outlets are being opened this month in Putney, Goodge Street, Harrow and Waverley Station in Edinburgh.

They will increase the number of Costa Coffee outlets by more than half to around 90 stores, and will take the operation further away from its traditional sites in airports and railway stations and on to high street locations.

These will place greater emphasis on building up a take-away trade in coffee. As well as selling coffee beans it will market coffee spin-offs such as coffee cups and coffee machines. Demand for real coffee is expected to grow by 60 per cent by the year 2001, Costa's managing director, Mike Dowell, said yesterday.

Costa has also taken over six airport coffee stand concessions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports currently operating as Staff's Cafes.

Separately, Gowings is opening five Burger King restaurants in Birmingham, Southampton, Bournemouth, Newbury and Newton Abbott. They will also employ an extra 300 people, and take the total number of Burger Kings operated by Gowings, which also operates Ford main dealerships, to 21.

A further 480 jobs are being created by Index, the Littlewoods-owned retailers. It will open five more stores across the country, creating 100 jobs, and open a £20m distribution centre in the West Midlands, adding another 380 staff to the payroll. The first store will be opened in Walsall in April, with the other four locations yet to be finalised.

Energy Group boosted by takeover speculation

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

Hanson's electricity and coal mining empire marked its historic split from the conglomerate yesterday with a better-than-expected rise in profits and a strong boost to its share price.

The surge reflected takeover speculation surrounding Eastern Group, the regional electricity company which forms one of Energy Group's main assets, following the US takeover bid launched for Yorkshire Electricity yesterday. Hanson bought Eastern, one of the UK's largest privatised power suppliers, in 1995 for £2.5bn.

Energy Group shares jumped 43.5p to 568.5p compared with Friday's closing price on the un-

official grey market, an increase of more than 8 per cent and valuing the company at £2.96bn. Energy Group investors received one share in the new group for every 10 they held in Hanson.

However investors were also relieved that Energy Group played down speculation that it was about to launch a big spending spree in the US. In a clear break with his Hanson past, Derek Bonham, Energy Group's executive chairman, made clear he was only planning smaller-scale acquisitions in the US in the next few weeks running into "the tens of millions of dollars rather than the hundreds of millions".

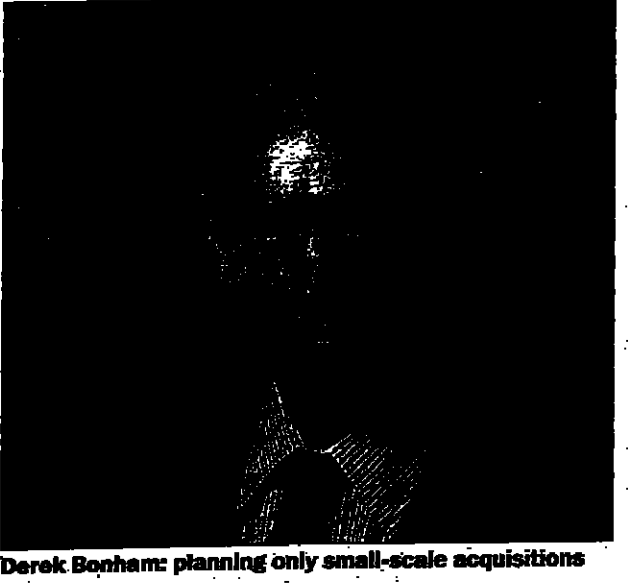
The news was interpreted as an attempt to calm fears that an

aggressive takeover policy would sharply raise the group's debts. Outlining demerger plans last month Energy Group executives had said the company was evaluating substantial investments in US generation. It already owns Peabody Coal, the world's largest privately owned producer of coal. The most likely short-term opportunity remains the purchase of an American power marketing company. Sources suggested discussions had gone beyond the due diligence stage and the two sides were now "negotiating on price".

Energy Group revealed a 38 per cent rise in operating profits to £138m in the three months to the end of December. Earnings from the electricity businesses more than doubled from £23m to £57m, reflecting Eastern's purchase last year of coal-fired power plants from National Power and PowerGen.

Eastern also said it now supplied 40,000 gas customers in trials of domestic competition in the South-west and South of England. However it did not disclose possible losses made on gas contracts last year in the industrial market, where it is second only to British Gas. Eastern was hit by the unexpected rise in the price of gas in 1996, having signed contracts to supply fuel to industrial customers at low prices.

Meanwhile profits from the coal businesses in the US and Australia were unchanged during the quarter at £25m. Energy Group confirmed plans to pay a final dividend for the year to the end of March of 5.5p.



Derek Bonham: planning only small-scale acquisitions

Hanson completes demerger

Hanson, the conglomerate that became a byword for aggressive takeover activity in the 1980s, completed its demerger yesterday, leaving a rump of assorted building materials and electrical companies, writes Chris Godsmark.

The demerger, which split Hanson's coal and electricity businesses into the separately quoted Energy Group, means that following its reduced status the company's earnings now depend on the cyclical con-

struction industry. Announcing an 11 per cent increase in operating profits for these core operations in the three months to 31 December, Lord Hanson said: "Difficult conditions persisted in our UK markets but our main businesses all performed very creditably."

However, the results showed some boost from the long-awaited improvement in the housing market. "The housing upturn in the UK has translated into additional demand for

bricks and we anticipate this will extend to our other building products," explained Lord Hanson. Brick profits rose by 50 per cent to 66m.

Headline pre-tax profits in Hanson's combined operations including the demerged Energy Group slumped from £248m to £157m in the three months to the end of December. However the results in 1995 included £205m of earnings from businesses later sold or demerged before the latest split.

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business

Shares in Emap dive on Arculus resignation

Clifford German

Investors yesterday took fright at the unexpected resignation of David Arculus as managing director of Emap, the magazines and exhibitions group. Shares in Emap dropped by 28p to 785.5p, wiping £58m from the company's stock market value.

His decision to join United News & Media comes only months after Emap was rocked by a corporate governance row that culminated in the ousting of two non-executive directors. At that time Sir John Hoskys, chairman, played down rumours of a rift between Mr Arculus and Robin Miller, chief executive, over who would succeed him when he retires next year. Mr Miller, tipped to succeed Sir John, said yesterday no decision had been taken over who would become chairman.

Some analysts were surprised by the sharp mark-down yesterday in the share price of Emap. The company said Mr Arculus's departure was of his own choice.

Nick Ward, an analyst at Credit Lyonnais Laing, said: "The fact that Arculus is leaving is slightly disturbing." However, he added: "But the place will not fall apart without him."

Another analyst said the move was beneficial to both

companies, simplifying the management structure at Emap and bringing new expertise to United, which has expanded rapidly following last year's merger with MAI and the takeover of the Blenheim exhibitions group.

Mr Arculus joined Emap as corporate planner from the BBC in 1972 and became group managing director in 1989. One of his main contributions has been in merging the business magazines and business exhibitions divisions. He was seen as an outside candidate for the chairmanship, being more likely to move up to chief executive.

He was head-hunted for his job at United and his decision to leave was reported to the Emap board on Friday. His responsibilities will pass directly to the heads of the four operating divisions and he will not be replaced as managing director.

Sir John said: "We are sad to see David go, but recognise the appeal of UN&M, which includes mainstream television and newspapers, areas in which Emap does not operate."

Mr Arculus also emphasised the amicable parting. "I leave Emap in very capable hands. It's a company I admire greatly," he said.

Mr Arculus said he would be taking on a far bigger job at



Opposing views: Emap's chairman, Sir John Hoskys, played down rumours of a rift between David Arculus (right) and Robin Miller (left) a few months ago

United, having operational responsibility for consumer publishing, broadcasting and entertainment, which accounts for almost 80 per cent of group turnover and profits.

He decided to say how much his remuneration package would be when he joins United on 7 April.

Under his charge will be UK consumer publications including *Express* newspapers, *Exchange & Mart* and *Dailies*, US consumer publications - mainly free pick-up magazines - the broadcasting division and Miller Freeman, the business magazines and exhibitions group, which alone is

roughly equal in size to Emap. He remains a substantial shareholder in Emap, although it was believed yesterday he would dispose of his holdings in order to further his intention of becoming a substantial shareholder in United News & Media.

The price of United jumped 16.5p to 704p.

Cloned lamb sends PPL shares soaring

Magnus Grimond

Shares in PPL Therapeutics, the biotechnology group, soared 52.5p yesterday after it said it had been granted an exclusive licence for the technology which created Dolly the lamb, hailed as the world's first cloned animal. PPL also said it had filed a patent to protect the new scientific techniques.

Ron James, managing director, described the success with Dolly, which has an identical genetic make-up to its six-year-old "mother", as "a major sci-

entific advance" which would underline PPL's leading position in "transgenic" technology.

"This new breakthrough will open up the possibility for a variety of additional products to be produced economically by PPL. Some of these products could not be produced by existing technology - for example, human serum albumin used in the treatment of burns and other traumatic injury."

PPL was floated on the stock market last year to commercialise a process by which human proteins can be synthesised in

large quantities in genetically altered or transgenic animals.

Dolly was the result of work done by PPL's scientists working with the Roslin Institute, near Edinburgh. Roslin, which was established as a government research operation, has agreed to give PPL an exclusive licence for the technology in exchange for undisclosed royalties.

PPL already has a flock of sheep from a transgenic father, created by injecting DNA into an embryo and placing it back in the womb so that the animal is born in the usual way. Dolly

has involved taking a cell from a six-year-old "mother" to replace the genetic information in an unfertilised egg.

Alan Colman, PPL's research director, said the cloning process would allow scientists to single out more productive animals. At present five to ten embryos are produced, but only one or two survive. He suggested that the cloning process would eliminate that process, resulting in more cost-effective, Mr Colman suggested.

PPL's lead product is Alpha

1 Anti Trypsin or AAT for treating cystic fibrosis, which is currently in early-stage human trials. The proteins used in AAT are milked from the transgenic sheep before processing.

Mr Colman held out the prospect that the new cloning technology would also help deal with currently untreatable diseases like BSE and scrapie. He suggested that the cells which cause the diseases might be able to be removed from cattle and sheep, making them resistant.

IN BRIEF

• Simon Engineering is selling the access division's industrial businesses to Terex Corporation for \$90m (£55m). The disposal is in line with Simon's plans outlined last September to sell its access side to cut group debts. A spokesman for Simon said it would use \$75m to repay early the full amount of the US loan notes carrying the heaviest covenants and interest rates. In 1995, the businesses being sold had turnover of £11.8m, equal to 72 per cent of the access division's total.

• Regal Hotel, which last year paid £122m for the 60-strong chain of White Hart hotels from Forte, announced a 257 per cent surge in profits to £10.35m. Regal said it had completed the first phase of integrating the White Hart hotels, and added that the full benefits would come through this year. The company said average room yield rose by 2.8 per cent with occupancy up by 4.9 percentage points and room rates down 4.1 per cent. The dividend is doubled to 1p.

• Whitehead Mann Group is to seek a listing on the Stock Exchange. The company provides executive search, executive selection and consulting services to several blue-chip clients covering a range of industrial and commercial sectors. Its operating profit for the year ended 31 March 1996, before accounting for exceptional property costs of £800,000, was £1.9m.

• Shorro Holdings warned that analysts' forecasts would not be met due to tough second-half trading. It said results for 1996 would show profits of £500,000-£600,000, compared to some predictions by analysts of up to £800,000. The company also announced the £262,000 purchase of the steel security cabin business owned by James Halstead.

• Helphire, which provides car hire and repair services to motorists involved in accidents that were not their fault, is seeking a full listing that will value the group at £15m. The company intends to raise £6m to meet growing demand. In the year to last March, it made taxable profits of £327,000, up from £64,000 in 1994/95. Brokers to the issue are Williams de Broe.

• Ewart, the property group, reported a 13.2 per cent rise in pre-tax profits to £804,000 in the half-year to the end of October. Earnings per share improved from 1.42p to 1.92p. The dividend is being lifted 40 per cent to 0.7p.

• WEW Group has appointed Anna Vinton, founder of the Reject Shop, as a non-executive director. Along with her former husband, she built up the Reject Shop, which went public in 1988 and was acquired in 1994 by Upton & Southern.

• Caff Inns said Michael Norris, its finance director, had left the company to pursue other interests. Shares fell 5p to 185p.

Company Results				
	Turnover £	Pre-tax £	EPS	Dividend
Community Hospitals (P)	26.32m (23m)	4.55m (3.89m)	9.8p (8.0p)	3.5p (2.4p)
Olson Motors (P)	282.5m (241m)	5.5m (3.3m)	26.5p (15.5p)	6.0p (5.0p)
Salmon & General (P)	9.25m (7.2m)	1.94m (1.03m)	8.1p (4.1p)	0.4p
Swire (P)	8.75m (2.73m)	1.13m (710,000)	2.82p (1.87p)	0.7p (0.5p)
Flint (P)	10.24m (10.43m)	1.84m (1.53m)	3.8p (2.8p)	0.5p (0p)
Future International Holdings (P)	2.12m (1.64m)	29,000 (105,000)	-0.25p (1.25p)	
Southdown Group (P)	20.32m (11.14m)	1.53m (1.05m)	8.8p (7.0p)	2.4p
Hanson (P)	57.8m (54.9m)	157m (248m)	20.3p (28.9p)	
Haworth Int (P)	0.85m (1.1m)	857,000 (83,000)	11.7p (10p)	
Ribblesdale Group (P)	- (-)	831.83 (848.36)	44.7p (82.8p)	10.1p
Independent News (P)	- (-)	8123.8m (884.4m)	8167.8 (8134.8)	60c
London Pacific Group (P)	333.2m (311.3m)	46.9p (41.1p)	25p (28p)	
Pharmacia (P)	30.66m (19.53m)	6.27m (4.15m)	7.8p (5.3p)	0.85p (0.7p)
Regal Hotel Group (P)	68.33m (18.12m)	10.43m (2.91m)	4.68p (3.30p)	1p (0.5p)
Thorn (P)	1.10m (1.13m)	123m (113.5m)	8.6p (7.3p)	

(P) - Profit (L) - Loss (M) - New month (P) - Split period

THE INVESTMENT COLUMN

EDITED BY MAGNUS GRIMOND

Thorn prunes prickly problems posed by Radio Rentals

Thorn has been such a dismal performer since last August's Thorn-EMI demerger that shareholders are probably grateful for small mercies these days. Shares in the Radio Rentals and Crazy George's retailer have halved from their 408p level immediately post-demerger, but yesterday bounced 10 per cent to 203p on news of a store closure programme at Radio Rentals and a shake-up of the US business.

The more hopeful move is the closure of 90 smaller, under-performing branches of Radio Rentals. It will involve a one-off cost of £10m but should then yield savings of £6m a year.

But the US strategy looks extremely optimistic. The US rentals market is so volatile that only 40 per cent of customers stay with their agreements for more than six months. This high churn rate - far higher than in the UK - saddles Thorn with costly collection and refurbishment bills it is willing to do almost anything to cut. The Holy Grail is customer loyalty and Thorn is bending over backwards to achieve it through discounts which are unbelievably generous. One scheme, called the "6/50" entitles anyone who remains loyal to Thorn for more than six months to a 50 per cent discount on their rental deal for the remainder of the contract. Though this will have a severe effect on margins, the company hopes to recoup the difference by winning more customers and persuading them to stay longer.

The difficulty for Thorn's management is that, although the market responded positively to yesterday's actions, they do not alter some of the key underlying problems facing the business. The most serious is litigation against the company in the US, where several US states are claiming customers have been charged inflated interest rates in Thorn's rental agreements. Meanwhile, at home, Thorn is resigned to the introduction of the insurance premium tax, proposed in the last Budget. This could cut £10m from Thorn's UK profits as the sale of warranties to customers at the end of the rent-to-own contracts has been a lucrative business. Add to this the impact of sterling's strength and weak trading both here and in America and it all adds up to a sorry tale.

The US rentals market has fallen by 3 per cent on a like-for-like basis this year as cut-throat prices from electrical

retailers mean customers can afford to buy their gadgets rather than rent them.

All this is a long way from the glitter that was promised when Thorn was decoupled from EMI, a business that is not doing too well either.

Back then some analysts thought Thorn's rather dull rentals business might prove more attractive than its more glamorous sister.

Assuming Thorn makes its full-year forecast of £170m, the shares trade on a forward rating of less than 8. The low rating reflects the group's difficult position but the company's bruised shareholders are probably best advised to hold on for some kind of recovery.

Community feels squeeze

The continuing squeeze on nursing home budgets felled another victim yesterday when Community Hospitals said it was pulling out of the business.

The decision to put its operation up for sale means Community has finally admitted that its policy of combining hospitals with nursing homes has not been a success. The nursing home side has run through four directors in as many years and the hospitals side has outperformed of late, a trend continued in the latest results.

Pre-tax profits up 28 per cent at £4.95m for the six months to December saw all the growth in hospitals, which saw their trading results rise from £5.08m to £6.2m. The continuing care division, which as well as nursing homes includes the home nursing business, also for sale, was flat at £1.34m.

Negotiations with potential buyers for continuing care, said to be "at an early stage", but analysts are optimistic that the group will be able to realise net asset value of around £30m. The homes, which range from Bingley, West Yorkshire, in the north to London's Finchley in the south and out east as far as Chelmsford, should prove attractive to an industry increasingly aware of the need for consolidation rather than organic expansion. Like many others, occupancy at a lowly 76.4 per cent has been hit by recently opened homes.

Assuming it can raise a decent sum for the operation, the strategy looks sensible. If, perhaps a little belated, increased

throughput and an increased attention to cost control instituted by Alan Pilgrim, who took the chief executive's reins a year ago, helped raise the operating margin from hospitals from 19.2 per cent to 21.5 per cent. The group's 10 hospitals situated in an arc around London stretching from Surrey through Hertfordshire to Essex, with outlying ones in the West Country and Yorkshire, benefit from strong local franchises.

That should put Community in a strong position to attract its insurance company pre-masters, which provide 80 per cent of revenues, and should protect it from any attempt by insurers to cut rates as they build networks of "preferred providers" for their health-care services.

The company's "best view" of full-year profits of around £12.7m puts the shares, up 8p to 382.5p, on a forward p/e of 15. Worth holding as one of the few ways into the private hospital market.

PizzaExpress still on track

PizzaExpress has been a phenomenal performer since the 32-year-old pizza chain reversed into Star Computer in early 1993. In just four years, the shares have soared from around 70p to 560.5p, up 2p yesterday, as management have taken what was a predominantly South-east of England concept and started to extend it across the country.

Pre-tax profits have rocketed from £1.42m in 1993 to £9.98m last year and yesterday the group announced it had grown another 54 per cent to £6.28m in the six months to December. This success is all the more remarkable for the fact that the menus and the format have hardly changed in a generation which has seen the arrival of a flood of pizza-purveying rivals.

But PizzaExpress is aiming at a more upmarket audience. It still imports most of its ingredients from Italy (and is therefore benefiting from the strong pound) and genuinely attempts to make each restaurant different, with attractions and features ranging from clock towers and river terraces to jazz.

The "affluent, aspirational 20 to 50-year-olds" who crave this combination are still not being catered for, according to David Page, the chief executive. He reckons they could double or triple the size of the 127-strong chain in five years. The first (franchised) overseas restaurant opens in Los Angeles next week and there could be 10 to 15 within 18 months, ranging from the West Coast of the US to Delhi.

In the meantime, there is plenty to go for in the existing business. Last October's £25.5m share-financed deal to buy in 32 franchised outlets and one other restaurant will replace £719,000 of royalties with a contribution of £4.5m in a full year.

There are still eight franchised locations to be bought, with negotiations under way for half of them, which could eventually deliver up to £1m more.

This is a chain still far from maturity, with restaurants open for more than 10 years still producing growth of around 10 per cent and group like-for-like growth ahead of last year. Kleinwort Benson's forecast of full-year profits of £15.5m puts the shares on a forward multiple of 30, falling to 21, which looks up with events. Hold.

Biotech entrepreneur set for one more float

Magnus Grimond

Chris Evans, the biotech entrepreneur with a string of start-ups to his name, yesterday pledged not to launch another new venture for at least five years as he set the latest of his fledgling companies on the road to the stock market. Enviro, an environmental products and services group which numbers the Prince of Wales among its customers, will double annual sales to around £20m following the announcement that it is to acquire Aspinwall, said to be one of the UK's leading environmental consultancies, for £7.5m.

Mr Evans, who will see his stake in Enviro diluted from around 60 per cent to just under a half as a result of the deal, said he expected the group to float in 18 months to two years when it achieved "critical mass" through further acquisitions and moved into profit. He predicted the 15-month-old group would become the largest environmental services company in the UK within four months.

But this would be the last company he would establish on his own account for "five to six years", he promised yesterday. Mr Evans' quoted companies already include the biotech groups Chiroscience and Celsis, along with Toad, the car security products company whose shares crashed earlier this month. He said he was now "at saturation point".



At saturation point: Chris Evans promised yesterday not to establish another company for five to six years

The enlarged Enviro will be valued at around £25m by the latest buy, which is being paid for via the issue of £6.25m in shares and the rest in cash. Aspinwall was founded in 1972 by its eponymous chairman, Professor Rod Aspinwall, and turnover is now approaching £10m. Among the services provided by the group is the sort of environmental audit undertaken by Shell in the wake of the

uproar caused by plans to dump the Brent Spar offshore oil loading buoy in the Atlantic.

Enviro, which chalked up losses of between £1m and £2m in its first year, has already made three acquisitions. Mr Evans said QuantSci, a consultancy to heavy industry, Biotek, which develops biotechnology applications, and Bio-Industries, involved in waste treatment, were among the best brands in the business.

SmithKline settles US dispute

SmithKline Beecham, the pharmaceuticals giant, has paid \$325m (£199m) to settle a long-standing legal dispute with the US government for overcharging Medicare for patient services through its Clinical Laboratories division.

The payment will end civil and administrative claims against SmithKline for disputed claims from 1989 to 1996, and follows last week's announcement that the company had reached a tentative settle-

ment over the charges. Jan Leschly, SmithKline's chief executive, said yesterday: "SmithKline Beecham Clinical Laboratories never intentionally violated any laws."

He attributed the disputes partly to "ambiguities over regulations and guidelines," and said the company had decided to make a settlement to avoid "enormous potential costs and uncertainties connected with lengthy litigation."

SmithKline set aside \$406m

in 1995 to cover legal costs associated with the charges through the US Department of Health and Human Services, as well as another lawsuit brought by independent pharmacies over alleged discriminatory pricing practices.

Almost a year ago the company offered to pay \$30m to settle the dispute and also \$20m worth of generic Tagamet, the anti-ulcer drug. A spokesman said the pharmacies may still appeal that decision.

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business

Washington provides the prelude to a year of rising interest rates

Alan Greenspan, the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board in Washington, gives his Humphrey-Hawkins testimony to the US Senate Banking Committee tomorrow and Thursday. For people who are not up to speed on the finer points of US monetary procedure, all you need to know is that he gives this testimony twice a year and it is regarded as the most important guide to the future stance of US monetary policy for the next six months.

The thing that the markets will be looking for this time will be an indication of whether the Fed will increase interest rates in the face of a tightening labour market and very highly valued, maybe overvalued, shares. The Fed chairman does not make interest rate decisions by himself, but he is *primus inter pares* on the Fed's Open Market Committee, which does make the decision, and so his judgement will carry great weight. Short-term interest rates in the US have not changed for more than a year, and with the next FOMC meeting on 25 March, the immediate question for the financial markets is whether rates will go up then.

There are three forces suggesting that they might. First, Dr Greenspan warned back on 5 December about the "irrational exuberance" of Wall Street, and since then share prices have gone on rising. The Fed might feel the need to lean against this rise in case it gets carried out of hand and a subsequent collapse threatens the stability of the whole financial system.

Second, monetary growth, something that central banks always worry about, has been nudging upwards again, as the graph shows. And third, there is some pressure from pay settlements in the US which suggest that pay rises might start to feed through into inflation later this year.

The professional Fed-watchers seem pretty evenly balanced about the likelihood of a rise in March, but they are

generally agreed that if the Fed does not move next month, it is likely to tighten policy later in the year, perhaps in May. This will be a year of rising US interest rates.

It will also be the year of rising rates elsewhere in the world. UK rates will go up for reasons which are pretty clear: strong economic demand, some indications of asset price inflation, particularly in house prices, and a tightening labour market. Less obviously, it may also eventually see rising interest rates in the other main economies, in particular in Germany, where the good export performance will be further reinforced by the recent fall of the mark.

Domestic demand remains stagnant and unemployment has risen sharply in recent months, but the view of the Bundesbank is that this shows the need for structural reforms in taxation and the labour market, rather than further cuts in interest rates. Meanwhile the fall of the mark is starting to push up raw material and energy prices, something which will eventually start to worry the Bundesbank. In any case, money policy in Germany is quite loose at the moment: money supply is rising at the top of the target range.

Germany is not going to increase rates for some time, but it is at least conceivable that by



Hamish McRae

The coming period will be a test not just of the markets' nerve but also of the depth of support for central bank independence

the back end of this year rates there will be climbing too. If they go up in Germany they will rise in the rest of continental Europe. Finally, expect Japanese interest rates to start rising by the end of the year. At last there is an economic recovery, though

a weak one by previous standards. The yen has become very much weaker in the past two years and that trend seems likely to continue a while yet.

Put all this together and what do you have? From the perspective of the financial markets there is the fact that they will, at some stage in the next year to 18 months, have to push up the bill of rising interest rates. The bill may not turn out to be very steep, but a hill it will be.

But there is another and completely different perspective: the view of the rest of us. Over the past five years there has been a gradual movement towards giving central banks greater independence in setting monetary policy and giving governments less independence in setting fiscal policy. Within the European Union this is explicit in the Maastricht process, which requires the banks to be made independent, and requires governments to trim their deficits to meet the Maastricht criteria. If monetary union happens, monetary policy will be entirely independent of political control.

Elsewhere the move has been more patchy. Here in the UK the Bank of England has been given some greater degree of influence and may be given more after the election. In the US there has been no explicit constitutional change to correspond

with Maastricht, but the perceived success of Dr Greenspan at the Fed has given him enormous authority, while there has been continuing pressure to reduce the fiscal autonomy of the President and Congress, by measures such as the balanced budget amendment. In Japan the central bank has been formally given a greater degree of independence, though it is not clear how much this means in practice.

But these past five years of constitutional movement have been a period of falling interest rates. From a practical point of view it is much easier to applaud the wisdom of a central bank that uses its independence to deliver cheaper money, than it is to cheer when it wants to put rates up.

So the coming period of rising interest rates will be a test not just of the nerve of financial markets, but also a test of the depth of political support for the concept of central bank independence. If the financial markets react badly to rising rates, then the pressure on political support for independence becomes all the greater.

So this arcane process where the Fed chairman spends a couple of days being questioned by the US Senate has two levels of significance. It will be interesting, even for people who do not follow each twist and turn of US interest rate policy, to catch a feeling for the concerns of the Fed chief at this stage of the cycle. As the year unfolds we can then judge the level of comfort or concern of the Fed. But it is interesting also as an overture to the great debate which we will hear over the next three or four years about the proper location of monetary policy in the political process.

Higher interest rates are going to be unpopular. Should that unpopularity be loaded on to national central banks, an international central bank (such as will happen in Europe if EMU proceeds), or should it remain, in part at least, as a burden to be placed on elected politicians?

East End big 'uns play it safe with own airline

PEOPLE & BUSINESS

The Barclay brothers aren't the only fraternal partnership to come out of the East End and make it big in business. The Gold brothers - David and Ralph - have just launched their own executive airline at Biggin Hill, Kent.

The Golds have always liked the former Battle of Britain aerodrome - they owned the Biggin Hill flying club in the 1970s. Both are keen amateur pilots, and David has won the Malta air rally twice.

The launch of Gold Air International brings the estimated assets of the Gold Brothers to £230m. They own over 80 companies. Other interests include part-ownership of Birmingham City Football Club and 50 per cent of Sport Newspapers.

The Golds made their first real money in the 1970s by buying and selling a retail property in London's Queensway. A spokeswoman tells me they decided to launch an airline now for two reasons: firstly, they wanted a safe airline they could use themselves around the UK and Europe, not least following the tragic death of Chelsea director Matthew Harding in an air crash.

The Golds also think an airline has great commercial promise - they'll be spending £15m on jets for the company this year alone.

Anna Vinton, co-founder of the Reject Shop chain bought three years ago by Upton & Southern Holdings, is joining WEW Group as a non-executive director.

As Mrs Vinton is moving into familiar territory - the Reject Shop, as its name suggested, sold cheap and cheerful domestic goods, while WEW stands for the shop that sells "What Everyone Wants".

WEW's 80 stores in Scotland and the North-east sell discount clothes, and its new



Glory days: Sir Winston Churchill taking the salute at Biggin Hill

management is struggling to improve the group's faltering performance. Mrs Vinton admits: "It's going to be a tough job turning WEW around, but I think it's do-able. They have got the right strategy."

In fact Mrs Vinton was attracted to WEW because of the new men at the top - chairman James Millar, formerly head of William Lowe, which sold out to Tesco, and chief executive Richard

Boland, ex-head of the Freeman catalogue business. "They both came highly recommended - Lord MacLaurin at Tesco always said what a good business. William Lowe was," she says.

While most of the business world is copying up to the Labour government in waiting, Andersen Consulting is taking a counter-cyclical view. Andersen's current director of research and knowledge management, Patricia Hewitt,

is leaving to stand as a Labour candidate in the safe Labour seat of Leicester West, and is being replaced by Stephen Locke - a former private secretary to Nigel Lawson. To be fair, Mr Locke was a civil servant when he served Lord Blay - he worked in the Treasury from 1976 to 1982.

Since then Mr Locke has worked for the Consumers Association. Latterly he has been the CA's head of research and policy.

As such he should have the right experience to run Andersen's research and knowledge management arm. Look out for Andersen's next project - "best-value spin-drier".

Wickes, the troubled DIY chain, has appointed its third firm of PR spin doctors in just over a year. Wickes parted company with Brunswick in favour of Dewe. Wickes last June when "accounting irregularities" were discovered at the DIY chain. Dewe only agreed to stay on until the rescue rights issue was out of the way, since they already act for Wickes' rivals Boots, owner of Do It All.

City PR people rely heavily on lunches to communicate with journalists (he wrote, slipping his mineral water), which should be good news for London restaurants like Rowley's, the Jermyn Street eatery.

It is seeking to raise £800,000 via the Enterprise Investment Scheme. Petrol station chain Richard Guest, joint chairman and managing director, and joint chairman Christopher Barnett, a former merchant seaman, want the money to open further restaurants along Rowley's "steak and chips" lines. They say they may even start a restaurant outside London if the opportunity offers.

John Willcock

Foreign Exchange Rates

Country	Spot	1 month	3 months	Spot	1 month	3 months
US	1.6335	0.4	31.25	1.000	0.000	0.000
Canada	1.2244	54.40	164.10	0.750	0.000	0.000
Germany	2.7224	69.61	203.93	1.6667	0.000	0.000
France	6.5627	217.38	640.63	3.3333	0.000	0.000
Italy	7.0514	24.40	45.47	27.29	0.000	0.000
Japan	168.25	95.01	281.27	121.57	0.000	0.000
EU	1.4056	21.8	69.41	1.354	0.000	0.000
Denmark	14.046	222.17	655.56	8.3705	0.000	0.000
Netherlands	3.0073	82.4	240.25	1.8777	0.000	0.000
Sweden	1.0291	1.51	4.93	0.9	0.000	0.000
Norway	0.9431	150.90	380.27	3.9756	0.000	0.000
Spain	16.666	10.0	30.0	16.666	0.000	0.000
Switzerland	2.0323	20.0	60.0	2.0323	0.000	0.000
Australia	2.3752	85.76	239.26	1.4540	0.000	0.000
New Zealand	1.0163	1.0	3.0	1.0163	0.000	0.000
Hong Kong	12.852	94.0	280.83	7.2450	0.000	0.000
Malaysia	3.4047	0.0	0.0	2.4795	0.000	0.000
Singapore	1.3421	0.0	0.0	1.3421	0.000	0.000
Saudi Arabia	5.1292	0.0	0.0	3.7504	0.000	0.000
South Africa	2.3217	0.0	0.0	1.4213	0.000	0.000

Other Spot Rates

Country	Sterling	Dollar	Country	Sterling	Dollar
Argentina	16338	0.8999	Nigeria	191700	0.0000
Austria	13553	1.7500	Oman	1.0291	0.0000
Brazil	1.752	10.000	Pakistan	65.6166	0.0000
China	8.2739	0.0000	Philippines	43.0386	0.0000
India	5.5594	0.0000	Portugal	274.055	0.0000
Indonesia	1.5423	0.0000	Saudi Arabia	5.1292	0.0000
Japan	168.25	0.0000	South Africa	2.3217	0.0000
Korea	1.0163	0.0000	Taiwan	43.0386	0.0000
Malaysia	3.4047	0.0000	UAE	6.0003	0.0000

Forward rates quoted high to low are at a discount; subtract from spot rate. Spot rates quoted low to high are at a premium; add to spot rate. Dollar rates quoted as reciprocals. For the latest foreign exchange rates call 0801 123 3033. Cable cost 50p per minute (day rate) 45p after three lines.

Interest Rates

Country	Rate	Country	Rate	Country	Rate
UK	6.00%	Germany	2.50%	US	5.75%
France	5.50%	Italy	4.75%	Japan	5.00%
Canada	3.50%	Netherlands	3.25%	Sweden	5.00%
Denmark	4.00%	Spain	4.00%	Switzerland	3.00%
Australia	2.50%	Belgium	4.00%	Lombard	4.00%

Bond Yields

Country	5yr	10yr	15yr	20yr	30yr
UK	7.75%	8.00%	8.25%	8.50%	8.75%
US	6.25%	6.50%	6.75%	7.00%	7.25%
Germany	5.00%	5.25%	5.50%	5.75%	6.00%
France	5.00%	5.25%	5.50%	5.75%	6.00%

Money Market Rates

Instrument	7 Day	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months	1 Year
Interbank	5.75%	6.00%	6.25%	6.50%	6.75%
Bankers' Acceptance	5.75%	6.00%	6.25%	6.50%	6.75%
Treasury Bills	5.75%	6.00%	6.25%	6.50%	6.75%
Commercial Paper	5.75%	6.00%	6.25%	6.50%	6.75%

Tourist Rates

Country	Rate	Country	Rate	Country	Rate
Australia	1.6335	France	6.5627	New Zealand	1.3421
Canada	1.2244	Germany	2.7224	Sweden	1.6667
China	8.2739	Italy	7.0514	Switzerland	2.0323
India	5.5594	Netherlands	3.3333	UAE	6.0003
Indonesia	1.5423	Spain	16.666	US	1.6335

Life Financial Futures

Contract	Settlement	High/Low	Settlement	Open
Long Oil	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
Short Oil	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
Long Gas	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
Short Gas	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00

Life FTSE Index Option

Settlement	Settlement	Settlement	Settlement	Settlement
10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00

Energy

Contract	Settlement	High/Low	Settlement	Open
Long Oil	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
Short Oil	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
Long Gas	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
Short Gas	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00

Commodity Indices

Index	Settlement	High/Low	Settlement	Open
10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00

Industrial Metals

Contract	Settlement	High/Low	Settlement	Open
Long Oil	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
Short Oil	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
Long Gas	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
Short Gas	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00

Precious Metals

Contract	Settlement	High/Low	Settlement	Open
Long Oil	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
Short Oil	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
Long Gas	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
Short Gas	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00

Agricultural

Contract	Settlement	High/Low	Settlement	Open
Long Oil	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
Short Oil	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
Long Gas	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
Short Gas	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00

Other Softs

Contract	Settlement	High/Low	Settlement	Open
Long Oil	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
Short Oil	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
Long Gas	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
Short Gas	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00

Latest Unit Trust Prices

Unit Trust	Price	Unit Trust	Price	Unit Trust	Price
10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00

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sport

Cotton has caused nothing but trouble: not only the unseemly spat with De Glanville but also the undignified squabble with Will Carling

It is always gratifying to have your views – or your prejudices – confirmed by people who are directly involved. This is my happy experience over Fran Cotton's announcement of his preliminary party of 62 Lions. I make no apology for returning to the subject this week.

There was Jonathan Davies, writing in the *Independent on Sunday* two days ago. He seemed to be genuinely distressed by his exclusion. It does not require any great feat of the imagination to see why. As I wrote a week ago and as he confirmed on Sunday, to pick for the Lions was his one remaining ambition. Three-quarters of the way through the season and half-way through the Five Nations' Championship, he has

been told he will not be wanted on the voyage.

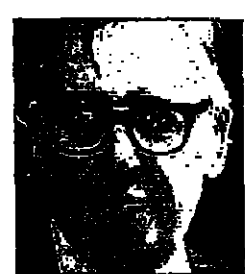
If we are to believe Cotton and his fellow selectors, Ian McGeechan and Jim Telfer, Davies ranks behind (in alphabetical order) Mike Catt, Craig Chalmers, Paul Grayson, David Humphreys and Gregor Townsend. If we are to believe Kevin Bowring, he also ranks behind Arwel Thomas, who likewise is not among Cotton's chosen five. This leaves us with the conclusion that, according to those set in authority over us in rugby matters, Davies is currently the seventh best outside-half in the British Isles. Which, as old Euclid used to say, is absurd.

But I do not want to turn this column into the Jonathan Davies Show.

I come to the evidence of Gregor Townsend and Jonathan Bell on *Rugby Special*.

In the past I have not always been kind to this programme, partly because of its silly gimmicks, prominent among them being the practice of its presenter, John Inverdale, of wearing jerseys to which he is not, as far as I know, entitled. Despite this deplorable habit, he remains a very good interviewer, with the knack of extracting from players or administrators comments they would not normally make.

Thus Peter Winterbottom is usually taciturn and – shall we say? – a little on the surly side. Dean Richards is rather more civil but still a man of few words. Yet a couple of



ALAN WATKINS

weeks ago Inverdale managed to get them both to say (quite independently, as far as I could tell) that as England No 8 they would prefer Ben Clarke to Tim Rodber. Whether they have changed their view after Rodber's performance against Ire-

land I do not know. No matter. The point is that they spoke frankly.

Last Sunday, similarly, Townsend and Bell spoke frankly about the announcement of the Lions party. Unlike Davies and Phil de Glanville, they cannot be accused of sour grapes, for they are both in the squad. Townsend said he had other things on his mind till the end of the season. Bell confirmed this feeling.

Altogether, Cotton has caused nothing but trouble: not only the unseemly spat with De Glanville about his exclusion but also the undignified squabble with Will Carling. Cotton having claimed that Carling would have made himself available had he been guaranteed the captaincy.

One might have thought that his

lamentable announcement would have had yet another unfortunate consequence: that is, depriving us of the opportunity to play the rugby that traditional evening game of picking the Lions. But not a bit of it. On the contrary, the naming of the 62 provides the opportunity to speculate on which of them will reach the final 35 and, of these, which 15 will form the Test side. Even more enjoyably, it provides the opportunity to heap curses on the heads of Cotton and his colleagues for not including our favourites in the squad already announced. It is all rather silly, because the Five Nations season is only half-way through, and matches may look entirely different in a month's time. Here, nevertheless, is

my selection, based neither on absolute merit, nor on what I expect Cotton and friends to do, but on how so far in the championship: J Stables, J Stables, A Bateman, S Gibb, T Underwood, P Grayson, R Halsey, G Roseberry, M Regan, J Leonard, M Johnson, S Shaw, D Corkery, S Quinlan, C Charvis.

Of these, Stables is not even in Cotton's 62. Nor, of course, is Jonathan Davies. I cannot pick him – not because I do not want to, which I do, but because he has performed so far only as a Welsh substitute. He therefore falls outside my self-imposed terms of reference. And this is as much a criticism of Bowring as it is of Cotton.

Logan to reap rich harvest

Bill Leith talks to the Scotland rugby union winger who will soon be facing some tough decisions about his future



Kenny Logan, who is expected to win a 29th Scotland cap at Murrayfield this weekend, will stand apart from the rest of his colleagues against Ireland.

Not in the way that left the former Iustonians and Ulster winger Keith Crossan entitled to feel awkward during the Irish anthem before the Scotland visit to Dublin in 1982 when the rest of the Irish team hailed from south of the border. Or because Logan is unique in having an ex-Lions captain Gavin Hastings, now a sports marketing agent, look after his interests.

Rather it is because only Logan, of the likely Scottish starting line-up due to be named today, has yet to sign a contract with the Scottish Rugby Union. Around £50,000 a year is his for the taking were he to remain in Scotland, but he insists: "The reason I haven't signed is because my brother and I split up our farm and it is going to take three to four months to sort things out. There would be days when I couldn't train because of work on the farm. I'm not going to do anything until I get that sorted out."

The situation means that Logan is effectively responsible for training on his own except during weeks culminating in international. During this period, a temporary agreement applies as with Duncan Hodge, the Watsonian stand-off who is expected to sit on the Scotland bench for the first time on Saturday.

Hodge recently turned down the chance to move to Northern Transvaal, whom he impressed during last year's Student World Cup, a future option that would be denied him were he to sign with the SRU. While the home-based players report to Murrayfield daily and the Exiles head up to Murrayfield every other Wednesday to

train, the 24-year-old Logan relies on solo sessions at a Stirling hotel gymnasium to keep in shape, as well as club work-outs.

It is hardly an ideal arrangement, although Logan has still managed to become one of only nine Scottish players meriting inclusion in a provisional Lions squad of 62. Nor was there anything in his performance against England last time out to suggest the solo regimes were having a detrimental effect on his form.

Going into that match, however, the SRU's contract negotiator, Kenny Crichton, had claimed "strength of personality" would enable Logan to do himself justice. In other words, Logan possesses an inner confidence which is rarely, if ever, overbearing.

'Some guys could be happy staying up here, but England is a big challenge'

Without doubt, Logan knows his own mind and there is no question his ambition is suffering down on the farm. Saracens have been linked with the former trialist goalkeeper with Heart of Midlothian, who says of a possible move to England: "If you are ambitious, England is the place to go. Some guys could be happy staying up in Scotland, but England is a big challenge."

"Scotland is a great place to live and down there would be different, but the rugby would be different too. I've had offers. I'm very ambitious. I would like to look back on my career and say I didn't try it – even if I didn't enjoy it."

Should Logan fail to make the final Lions squad, another option could beckon – American football. Mike Keller, general manager of the Scottish Claymores, has had Logan in his sights for some time and said recently: "Kenny could be a running back, which is one of the glamour positions."

"OJ Simpson was a great running back and sometimes with all his recent problems you hate to even mention his name, but OJ became a glamour Hollywood idol – and it all stemmed from being a great running back."

"I understand that because of Kenny's desire to be at home and run his farm, he has had some negotiation difficulties. This may open the door for the Claymores. We would have to see how Kenny catches an American football. But with his speed, toughness and ability to change direction I see possibilities." The Lions are due to name their squad a fortnight before the Claymores season begins in April, and Keller added: "We would be flexible."

Logan has been quick to shoot down speculation about a change of sport, but less forthcoming about Saracens' approaches conducted initially between the club's coach, Rob Cunningham, and Gavin Hastings. Cunningham said: "Hopefully a deal can be done and sooner rather than later." By resisting any temptation to sign an SRU contract, Logan may indeed be about to reap a rich harvest.

Damian Cronin, the Wasps lock, has been brought into the Scotland squad in place of the injured Shane Munro for the Five Nations match against Ireland on Saturday. Munro, one of three locks in the squad, has a knee problem. His withdrawal settles the selection issue for the Scotland second row, in which Dodi Weir and Andy Reed will be the lock combination.



Running man: Kenny Logan in training with the Scotland squad

Photograph: Empics

Mitchell lies in wait for Harlequins

CHRIS HEWITT

If you can't beat 'em, at least make their lives as difficult as possible. Phil de Glanville may not be in a position to lay a hand on the Pilkington Cup this season, but if Harlequins, Leicester or both slip up at the semi-final stage on 29 March, they will see the England captain's all-over-the-scene of the crime.

De Glanville has not had a great deal to say about since being ignored by the Lions selectors last week, but he could barely conceal a mischievous chuckle yesterday. Asked to make the draw for the last four of the knock-out competition, he promptly pulled the rug from under his greatest club rivals by sending Quins to Sale and Leicester to Gloucester. He had no fury like a Bath captain scorned, especially when it comes to Pilkington business.

Leicester, who have blasted De Glanville's team out of the competition in the sixth round, can be sure of the most physical of welcomes at Kingsholm: far more intimidating, indeed, than the one they faced at New-castle on Saturday, even though Gloucester have no intention of asking Dean Ryan to guest for them on a one-off basis. "It will be warm," De Glanville grinned.

But the real fun is likely to occur at Heywood Road, where Quins will play their eighth semi-final in 10 years in front of 5,000 Cheshire supporters sardined into one of the the Courage League's more ramshackle grounds. "I don't think Quins will fancy that at all," said De Glanville with a rare degree of relish. "If I were a betting man, I'd have a dabble on Sale."

Quins have already lost to Sale both home and away this season and with John Mitchell, the shrewdly analytical former All Black, now firmly established in the north-easters' back row, the Londoners will be

more wary than ever. Sale have not lost a match since mid-October and their appointment of Mitchell as player-coach is beginning to look more inspired by the week.

"It will be a great honour to be involved in a semi-final in the North-west, where the occasion should do wonders for the profile of rugby in the area," said Mitchell, who led Wakefield to a famous victory over the Lions in 1993 and now renews his battle of wits with Quins' rugby director, Dick Best, who was one of the tourists' coaches that day.

"The capacity of our ground might be a little small for a match of this magnitude, so we'll explore the option of hosting it elsewhere. Old Trafford, which is just up the road, would be wonderful. But then, the players love their own ground and see it as an advantage. Whatever happens, it will be a tough match for both sides."

Leicester, who have matched their own record by reaching a sixth consecutive cup semi-final, are ungenerously priced favourites at 13-8 on. Sale's emergence as a real force in the English game, not to mention their home draw, is reflected by their odds of 7-2, the same as those of Quins. Gloucester, the first English knock-out champions back in 1972, are the 20-1 outsiders.

In Wales, Neath and Swansea were thrown together in a potentially outstanding Swale Cup quarter-final tie. Their great west Wales rivals, Llanelli, should have an easier time of it against Pontypool at Stradey Park while Cardiff can expect to defeat South Wales Police at a center. Ebbw Vale face either Bridgend or Treorchy in the remaining match.

PILKINGTON CUP Semi-final draw: Sale v Harlequins; Gloucester v Leicester (Ties to be played Saturday 29 March). **SWALE CUP Quarter-final draw:** Ebbw Vale v Treorchy or Bridgend; Cardiff v South Wales Police; Neath v Swansea; Llanelli v Pontypool (Ties to be played Saturday 22 March).

Van Dijk puts Hampstead on a high

HOCKEY
BILL COLWILL

Hampstead and Westminster became the first Regional League team to claim their place in the National League play-offs following a resounding 6-1 victory against their nearest challengers, Anchorage.

The Dutch striker Jan-Joh van Dijk scored four times with Mark Crowley's two taking his season's total to 26. Anchorage's consolation came from Neil Gordon. The Kent side, still eight points ahead of third-placed Tunbridge Wells, were favourites to take the second play-off slot from the Nastro Azurro South League.

In the North, Norton, 3-1 winners at Ben Rhydding, have all but reached the play-offs. In the other regions there is much to play for. In the East, Adnam League Chelmsford edged nearer Cambridge City as City were held to a 2-2 draw by Ipswich. Chelmsford, with Rob Hawkins and Pat Oxley both scoring twice, thrashed Sudbury 6-2 to keep their hopes alive. They play City in their final game.

In the DTZ Midland Premier, Loughborough Students had a narrow 1-0 win against Olton and West Warwick while Harborne kept up the pressure with a resounding 12-1 win at Bloxwich and trail by three points. The teams meet on Saturday in their penultimate game.

Europe's Soccerroos say G'day to Venables

Clive White visits the Ealing set of an ex-England coach's latest adventure

It was all purely coincidental, of course, but the Aussies did seem to be rubbing the Poms' noses in it again yesterday.

OK, so they have "stolen" our national coach, but did they really have to remind us of the fact by holding their first European training camp for Terry Venables' Soccerroos on Wembley's doorstep? And as for arriving for yesterday's session in the official England team bus, well...

They had not taken too kindly to being described as a pub team at the weekend and Dave Hill, the chairman of Soccer Australia, was in the mood to throw down the gauntlet to England – "any time, anywhere."

Cricket
MARK BALDWIN reports from Napier

England are awaiting a verdict on the fitness of their captain, Mike Atherton, as they rest in preparation for tomorrow's third one-day international against New Zealand here.

Victory would give Atherton's team the one-day series 3-0, with two games still to play.

The idea clearly tickled the fancy of the cheeky chappy, too, but that was for the future, perhaps next spring by which time he hopes to have successfully led Australia through the qualifying programme to the World Cup finals in France.

After the events at Wembley the other week, who is to say he has not backed the right horse. "Bhili and the Solomon Islands certainly look rather less formidable opposition than Italy and Poland, even if there are a couple of play-offs to follow after that before they could celebrate reaching their first finals since 1974."

Having led the Australian-based players to victory in a four-nation tournament involving Norway, South Korea and New Zealand last month, this was Venables' first get-together with those Australians who play in Europe. It was an indication of

just how enthusiastically his appointment has been received by them, if not necessarily everyone back home, that 29 players made it to London for this three-day camp, including some who are too injured to take part. The one notable absentee is Paul



Fair dinkum duo: Terry Venables, Australia's new coach, (right) and Mark Bosnich yesterday

Okon, the Lazio sweeper, who is undergoing an exploratory knee operation.

The weather may have been bitterly cold and blustery on the playing fields of the Barclays Bank Sports Ground in Ealing, but Venables was in his element,



Fair dinkum duo: Terry Venables, Australia's new coach, (right) and Mark Bosnich yesterday

back doing what he does best: working with players. Not surprisingly, his sudden change of allegiance caused a bit of confusion at times, the players never too sure which "we" he was referring to. "Yes, you might say there was a lot of 'we'-ing going on there today," Venables said.

He rejected the suggestion that he was working with vast inferior material to that which he had in his hands just seven months ago. The quality of the players had impressed him. He reckoned he had an even bigger pool to choose from than, say, Wales or Northern Ireland and has likened Australia's standing to that of Hungary, whom they will play in a friendly in Budapest on 2 April. "People will be surprised how good the team is that we eventually come up with," he said, singling out such lesser names as Mark Viduka, a striker from Zagreb

whom he believes could be more than a bit special.

Of his own high-profile, highly paid appointment, he said: "I believe good coaching makes a big difference. I think the coach can make or break a team. They have always recognised that in American sport and now places like Italy are realising how important the coach is and are starting to pay them big money."

Venables, for one, is being rewarded rather better than he was with the Football Association. But wasn't there just a tinge of regret at leaving his job as England coach? "None whatsoever," he replied. "If the circumstances were repeated I'd do the same again."

The skill factor looked extraordinary high at yesterday's session in difficult conditions, but I'm not sure what the boys back in Wagga Wagga would have made of the pink bibs.

Devils take long road to success

ICE HOCKEY

The new Superleague champions, Cardiff Devils, will start a triumphant end to their campaign with away matches.

The league yesterday finalised the play-off fixtures for the remaining three weeks of the season, with Cardiff drawn in Group A alongside Ayr Scottish Eagles, Newcastle Cobras and Manchester Storm.

Cardiff start the six-game programme with a Group A trip to Newcastle on Saturday and end with a trip to Manchester's Nynex Arena on Thursday 13 March. On Sunday the Nynex attracted a record high crowd for a British ice hockey match – 17,245 – as the hosts, Manchester Storm, defeated last year's Grand Slam winners, Sheffield Steelers. It will stage the semi-finals and finals – replacing the traditional venue, Wembley Arena.

SEMI-FINALS: PLAY-OFFS: Group A: Sat 1 March: Newcastle Cobras v Cardiff Devils; Sun 2 March: Newcastle Cobras v Manchester Storm; Sat 8 March: Cardiff Devils v Manchester Storm; Sun 9 March: Newcastle Cobras v Cardiff Devils; Sat 15 March: Newcastle Cobras v Cardiff Devils; Sun 16 March: Newcastle Cobras v Cardiff Devils; Sat 22 March: Newcastle Cobras v Cardiff Devils; Sun 23 March: Newcastle Cobras v Cardiff Devils; Sat 29 March: Newcastle Cobras v Cardiff Devils; Sun 30 March: Newcastle Cobras v Cardiff Devils; Sat 6 April: Newcastle Cobras v Cardiff Devils; Sun 7 April: Newcastle Cobras v Cardiff Devils; Sat 13 April: Newcastle Cobras v Cardiff Devils; Sun 14 April: Newcastle Cobras v Cardiff Devils; Sat 20 April: Newcastle Cobras v Cardiff Devils; Sun 21 April: Newcastle Cobras v Cardiff Devils; Sat 27 April: Newcastle Cobras v Cardiff Devils; Sun 28 April: Newcastle Cobras v Cardiff Devils; Sat 5 May: Newcastle Cobras v Cardiff Devils; Sun 6 May: Newcastle Cobras v Cardiff Devils; 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Oxford president has throne but no seat

Rowing
HUGH MATHESON

Ed Bellamy, the Oxford Boat Club president, made boat race history when he left himself out of the crew to take on Cambridge, which he announced yesterday. On 29 March, he will instead row for the Dark Blue reserves.

Bellamy, a blue in 1996, was elected president by the crew last May and has rowed every mile that Oxford crews have travelled since then, but he lost out at the last stage of crew selection.

Bellamy has entrusted the training and choice of his crew to René Mijnders, who coached the Dutch eight to Olympic gold in Atlanta. After making his challenge to the Cambridge president, Edham Ayrer, yesterday Bellamy said: "That is how it is now, and will stay, unless of course people stop performing well."

In the past, presidents have stepped down, but none of Bellamy's predecessors has rowed in the Isis-Goldie race for the reserves. He pointed out that Oxford has not beaten Goldie since 1989 and that confidence in this breeding ground is low. He said: "I would like to win it as an achievement for myself and because it will give inspiration to the up-and-coming oarsmen who we will depend on next year."

Mijnders said that selection was a continuous process. "It only became clear in the last week or so," he said. "We have done some lactate tests, which illustrate the fitness of the crews at this stage, and they are pretty close to the Dutch eight at this time last year."

Robin Williams, the coach in charge of the Cambridge squad,



Cambridge University's light blue crew for the Boat Race got a good look at their opponents at yesterday's announcement of the line-ups

Photograph: David Ashdown

suggested there could yet be some fine-tuning of his crew. "We lost a week in January to ice and a couple of days last week to wind and our selection is not quite complete," he said. The crew will be stroked on bow side by James Ball, last year's winner. Behind him on

stroke side are four enormous men: David Cassidy and Damien Maltspur are the shortest at 6ft 4in. Alex Storey, a freshman at 24, is topped at 6ft 7in by the president, Ayrer, who is a touch under 6ft 9in. It appears that Cambridge will be a fraction taller and older,

and Oxford will have a marginal weight advantage, but the crews are very close on all the normal criteria. There is an encouraging number of British undergraduates who have got in ahead of older postgraduate students from abroad. Even in Bellamy's case,

he is in contention with Charlie Humphreys. Both learned to row at Hampton School and were junior internationals. Bellamy arrived at Oxford via Durham University and a gold medal in the Under-23 World Championships while Humphreys came straight from school.

BOAT RACE CREWS

OXFORD UNIVERSITY
C P A Humphreys (Ox), T J C Foster (Ox) of London and St Cross, R Bland (Barnes College), L Bland (Barnes College), J B Rye (Ox), J Irving (Ox), A J R Linsley (Barnes), N J Robinson (Ox).
Coach: P A Greenway (St Edmund Hall).

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY (from)
E D Ayrer (St Edmund's House), R J Pim (Downing), J Ball (Robinson College), R Bradshaw (Cromwell), A Storey (St Edmund's), T J Wallace (Jesus), D P S Maltspur (Trinity College), A R Westman (Selwyn), D J Cassidy (Trinity), C K Whymann (Pembroke).

Hansen loses world title chance

Athletics
MIKE ROWBOTTOM

Ashia Hansen, who has twice beaten the world's top ranked triple jumper this year, will not have the chance of registering a third victory at the World Indoor Championships in two weeks' time.

Hansen, who beat Rodica Petrescu-Matei of Romania in Birmingham on Sunday with an effort just one centimetre short of her British record of 14.30 metres, was not named yesterday in the 1997 World Indoor Championships in the 7m 10m March because she missed the world indoor trials a fortnight ago.

The omission of the 25-year-old American-born jumper - which was heavily signalled by Britain's chief coach, Malcolm Arnold, on Sunday - leaves Britain with only two obvious medal challenges: Jamie Baulch in the 400 metres and Steve Smith in the high jump, although both 400 metres relay teams look capable of earning a medal as well.

"I have spoken to Ashia and she is upset," Arnold said. "It's sad. I have an enormous regard for her, and after Atlanta I've said she was one of our stars for the future."

"But she knew the rules. All the athletes were sent a letter last December telling them what the selection guidelines were. We will be damned for selecting her, but we will be damned if we don't. What the athletes asked for was consistency in selection and that is what we have done."

Hansen, who missed the trials because she was training and competing in South Africa, said: "I knew there were to be trials before I went but my trip was already arranged and I knew I wouldn't be back in time. I was told the team wasn't going to be picked until February 23 so I thought there would be time to get in some good performances after the trials."

John Maycock, who set a British 3,000 metres record on Sunday, will not doubt be relieved to see his name on the team sheet. He also missed the trials, but provided the selection with a doctor's note vouching that he had fainted. But he could have done without the jitters during wait until last Friday, when he received his first indication that his case would be looked at kindly.

Jason Livingston, Britain's 600 metres trials winner, becomes, as expected, the first athlete from this country to win an international medal after returning from a four-year drugs ban. Livingston, European indoor champion five years ago, will do very well to get a medal given the excellent form of rivals such as Ray Stewart, Bruno Surin, and the in-form Ato Boldon.

The best hopes for a champion lie with Baulch, who beat the reigning champion Darnell Hall for a fourth consecutive time at the weekend, and Smith, the Olympic bronze medalist whose winning effort of 2.34

metres on Sunday puts him top of the world rankings.

Baulch and Mark Eaton, his partner in the 1996 Olympic 100m, could combine with a perfect relay. The winners' team captain, Sally Gunnell, maintaining her comeback after being carried injured from the Olympics, hopes to do the same alongside Phyllis Smith, who bettered Gunnell's British record on Sunday.

Britain's 1,500 metres indoor champion, Paula Radcliffe, is expected to win the 1,500 metres, 3,000 metres, 5,000 metres, 10,000 metres, 20,000 metres, 30,000 metres, 40,000 metres, 50,000 metres, 60,000 metres, 70,000 metres, 80,000 metres, 90,000 metres, 100,000 metres, 110,000 metres, 120,000 metres, 130,000 metres, 140,000 metres, 150,000 metres, 160,000 metres, 170,000 metres, 180,000 metres, 190,000 metres, 200,000 metres, 210,000 metres, 220,000 metres, 230,000 metres, 240,000 metres, 250,000 metres, 260,000 metres, 270,000 metres, 280,000 metres, 290,000 metres, 300,000 metres, 310,000 metres, 320,000 metres, 330,000 metres, 340,000 metres, 350,000 metres, 360,000 metres, 370,000 metres, 380,000 metres, 390,000 metres, 400,000 metres, 410,000 metres, 420,000 metres, 430,000 metres, 440,000 metres, 450,000 metres, 460,000 metres, 470,000 metres, 480,000 metres, 490,000 metres, 500,000 metres, 510,000 metres, 520,000 metres, 530,000 metres, 540,000 metres, 550,000 metres, 560,000 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Logan's run
Scotland's rugby union
winger goes solo, page 22

Sport

Dark Blue's blues
President rules himself out
of Boat Race, page 23

Germany dismiss idea of joint bid

Football

England and Germany are back in competition for the right to stage the 2006 World Cup after both sides reiterated their intention to go it alone yesterday.

Reports that Egidius Braun, the president of the German Football Association, had mooted the possibility of a joint bid by the two on Sunday were deemed to be the result of interpretation problems by officials in Frankfurt.

Alec McGivan, in charge of England's bid, also remained insistent that the idea of a joint initiative looked a non-starter after Fifa, the world governing body, announced they would discuss such a proposal.

"Our position remains unchanged because we still feel that England has a very strong case for staging the 2006 finals and we already have a lot of support from around the world," McGivan said.

Braun's remarks on German television were misconstrued to indicate that the two poles of thought over the rival European bids were now coming together. A spokesman for the German FA said yesterday: "Our president never spoke about a joint bid and it was all a case of misinterpretation."

"During the programme, in which he was talking about the German bid alone, Mr Braun talked about having a split European bid rather than a single

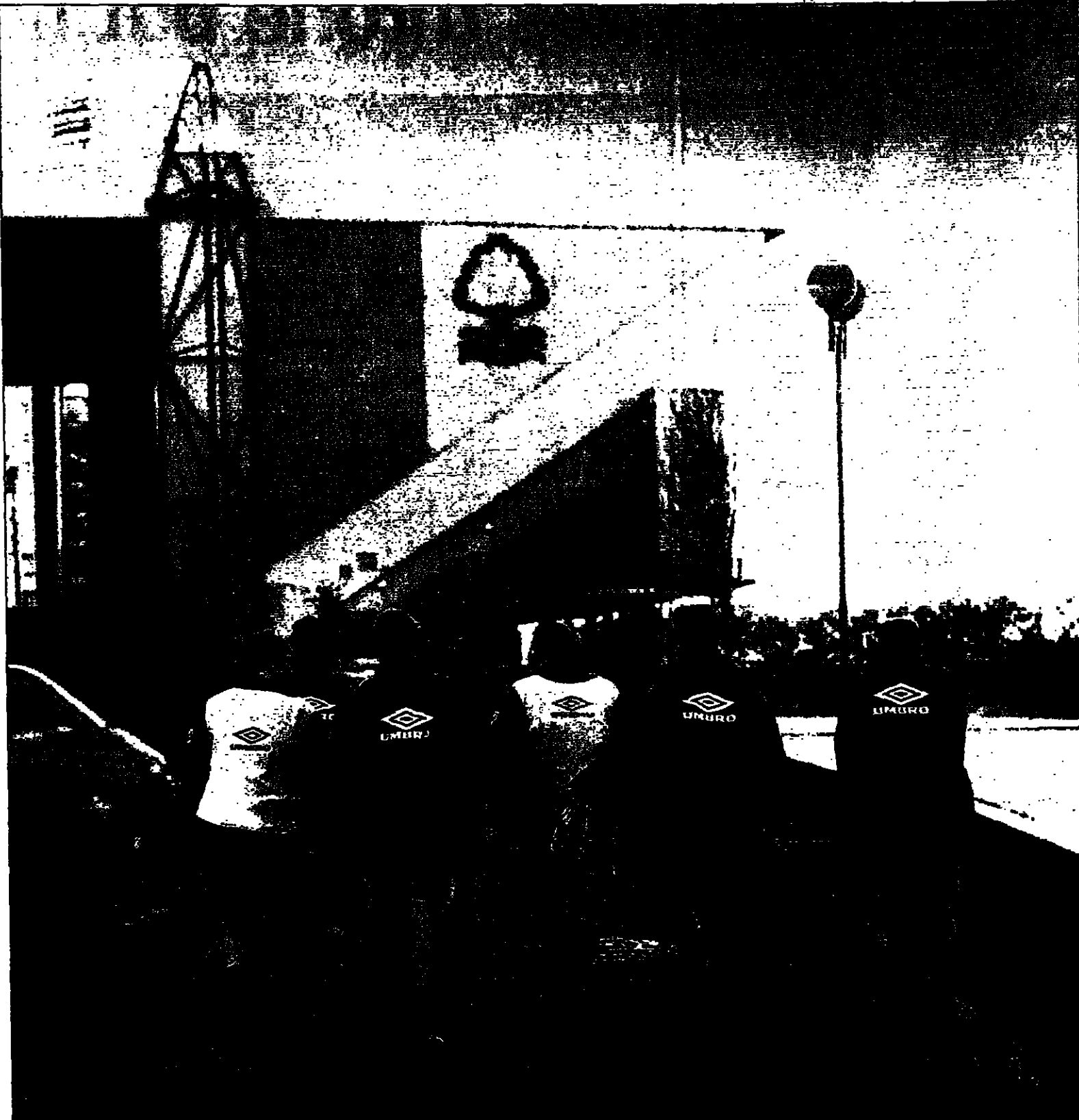
bid from Germany. What he meant was that two bids would come from Europe - one from us and one from England, but his comments lost something in the translation to make it seem that he was calling for a joint bid. That is not the case.

The finals will be shared for the first time when Japan and Korea co-host the event in 2002, but Fifa insists this will be a "one-off" arrangement with an immediate switch back to the traditional single-country format thereafter.

The world governing body's stance did not surprise the FA, but McGivan believes that the idea of a joint bid will almost certainly rear its head again before the outcome is announced in June 2000.

The row over the 2006 finals broke out earlier this month when Uefa announced it was backing Germany's bid and claimed to be unaware of England's rival stance. Since then, England have at least won a concession from the sport's European governing body that it will examine both countries' cases. Both will push their claims when Uefa's executive committee meets on 17 April, with Uefa declaring that it will only support one bid.

But with South Africa, Brazil, Argentina, Egypt and Morocco also expected to submit bids before the Fifa-imposed deadline in 1999, it is not even certain if Europe will actually be given the finals.



Nottingham Forest players return to the City Ground after training alongside the River Trent yesterday. Last night the future of the club was due to be decided at a shareholders' meeting called to vote on a £19.3m takeover bid

Photograph: Matthew Ashton/Emics

Fury over attack on Juventus team bus

Sergio Campana, the head of the Italian players' union, has called for British-style policing at Italy's grounds in the wake of Sunday's attack on the Juventus team bus.

Windows were shattered and glass fragments sprayed over players and officials in the attack by a group of Fiorentina fans who ambushed the bus on its way to the stadium in Florence.

No one was injured, but the attack caused outrage among leading figures in Italian football and was discussed yesterday at a meeting of Campana's union in Rome. Campana is particularly angry that none of the stone-throwers have been caught by the police.

"What I can't understand, and much less tolerate, is the fact that an offence committed by an individual goes unpunished but when it's a group of football fans, then impunity becomes the rule," he said.

"This tolerance of gang behaviour is becoming dangerous," he warned, adding that Italy needed to learn from Britain's example when it comes to crowd control. "In England, if a fan throws something on to the pitch, he soon finds himself in handcuffs and the following day he's in court."

"Here in Italy, people have been turning a blind eye to things for too long."

Sunday's incidents, which included scuffles involving police and fans, followed missile-throwing earlier this month at Reggina's match against Parma.

"It's not enough for the referee to pick the objects up and give them to the fourth match official as if nothing had happened," Campana said.

The Fiorentina president, Vittorio Cecchi Gori, described the youths who carried out Sunday's attack as "delinquents, like those who kill people by dropping stones from motorway bridges" - a recent phenomenon in Italy.

Cecchi Gori added that he had offered to go in front of the Juventus team bus next season. "But these sort of people would still throw stones," he said. "They are not Fiorentina fans and they don't even deserve to be talked about."

The Juventus coach, Marcello Lippi, aware of the intense rivalry between Fiorentina and Juventus fans, said: "This match is always accompanied by tension, and in this case by an ugly episode. But on the pitch, the players showed their concentration and their professionalism."

Fiorentina may be punished for what happened, with the club possibly being told to play a home match away from their own ground.

Dalglish bid for Murphy refused League ignores pleas

ALAN NIXON

Kenny Dalglish has had a £1.5m bid for Crewe's Danny Murphy rejected by the Second Division club. The Newcastle United manager wanted to sign the teenage striker with the cash he raised from selling Paul Kitson.

Liverpool apparently have first option on Murphy. Dalglish has made an offer that the Anfield club will not match, but Crewe's manager, Dario Gradi, would rather keep Murphy at the moment and sell the midfielder Gareth Whalley instead.

Whalley has recently been at Liverpool on trial, but there appears to be no prospect of a permanent deal at the moment.

The England goalkeeper coach, Ray Clemence, has denied that he will be working for

Southampton when his England duties allow, as weekend reports had suggested. "I'm not employed by Southampton in any capacity. I have a full-time job as the Football Association's national goalkeeping coach," the former Liverpool and Tottenham keeper said yesterday.

Graeme Sharp has been "severely censured" by the Football Association after being found guilty of misconduct for comments made to a referee while he was the manager of Oldham Athletic. Sharp, who left the Boundary Park club two weeks ago, made the remarks to the Cambridgehire referee, Mike Bailey, at half-time during Oldham's 2-1 win over Manchester City on 21 December.

John Toshack is interested in the vacant Blackburn Rovers manager's job. The Welshman

is available for a return to British football after leaving the Spanish club, Deportivo La Coruña, and he has let Rovers know he is keen on the post. He has not worked in domestic club football since his spell at Swansea over a decade ago.

Brian Laws, the former Grimsby manager, is the new manager of Scunthorpe United. He replaces Mick Buxton, who ended his second spell at the Humberside club by mutual agreement earlier this month.

Laws, sacked by Grimsby last November, is the 22nd managerial change at Scunthorpe since World War II. Mark Lillis, who was in charge for last Saturday's home win over play-off chasing Colchester, has been upgraded from coach to assistant manager.

Leicester City's manager,

Martin O'Neill, is interested in signing Port Vale's left-winger Steve Guppy in a £1m deal. Vale are poised to sell Guppy, who played under O'Neill at Wycombe, after he rejected a new contract offer.

The Aston Villa midfielder Sasa Curcic has put in a transfer request - which will mean him losing at least £100,000 in bonuses. Curcic would still have been entitled to the money - mainly from signing-on fees - had he not formally asked for a move.

Manchester City's manager, Frank Clark, wants conclusive contract talks with Steve Lomas, who has attracted interest from Coventry. Clark is going to ask the Northern Ireland midfielder if he is keen to extend his deal at Maine Road. If not, he could be sold quickly.

The Football League yesterday decreed that the Nationwide season will not be extended beyond 4 May, despite the threat of fixture congestion.

Manchester City have registered their discontent over the likelihood that Northern Ireland's two World Cup qualifying games with Portugal and Ukraine will disrupt their Easter programme.

Scotland also have two qualifiers, against Estonia and Austria, arranged for the same week, while the Second Division clubs, Wrexham and Stockport, have been in touch with Lytham over the problems that their respective FA Cup and Coca-Cola Cup campaigns have brought to their promotion bids.

A Football League spokesman, Chris Hull, said: "Manchester City's main worry was

the dislocation of their season through international call-ups, while Stockport and Wrexham's cup commitments have caused them problems. But there is no question of the League extending the season beyond the scheduled final weekend of Saturday 3 May and Sunday 4 May."

"We have put forward a proposal to Manchester City that we will ease their worries, while our contact with both Wrexham and Stockport has just been a case of liaising with the two clubs to help them balance their remaining fixtures."

The week beginning Saturday 29 March was designated for World Cup qualifiers by Fifa, the world governing body, well in advance of the League announcing its own fixtures, and Wales play host to Belgium

while the Republic of Ireland travel to Macedonia.

Hull explained: "Although we knew that it was a World Cup week, we did not have specific dates when our fixtures were arranged. That both Northern Ireland and Scotland will play on the Saturday and then again in midweek means that we will lose the weekend as well as the following midweek."

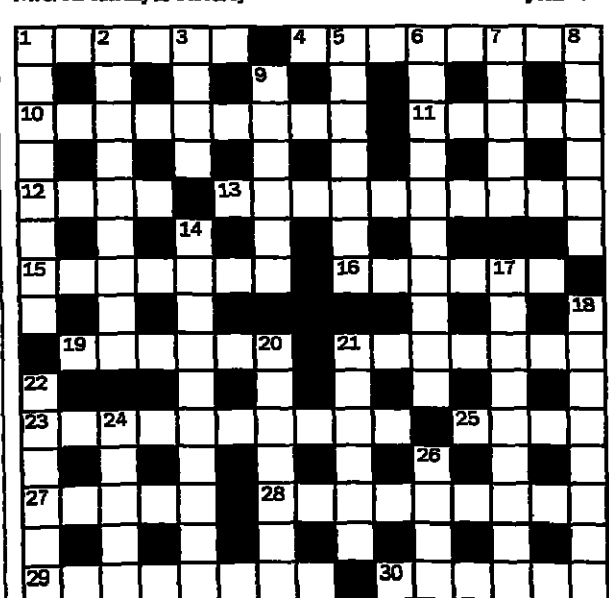
"It means it becomes an even more difficult balancing act for us, but we feel that there will be no real problem in fitting in all the games by the designated end of season date."

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3231, Tuesday 25 February

By Andrew

Monday's Solution



ACROSS

- 1 Preserve lots of money, about a hundred thousand (6)
- 4 Go wrong regularly but not extremely as an individual (8)
- 10 Liberal about to get sanctimonious when restricting a Conservative (9)
- 11 Algerian port accommodates good liver? (5)
- 12 What you pay to go to China? (4)
- 13 Perhaps legislation of the Dail which shows nature's perversity? (7,3)
- 15 Record set in rocky work by him? (7)
- 16 One directing cattle by day with typical dog (6)
- 19 Fine fabric is new in the market place (6)
- 21 Ardent support from a new Democratic club (7)
- 23 Power shown by Foster novel about mum in typical part of

DOWN

- 2 I do better coming up to put out fire as a calm type (8)
- 3 Rich clothing about clergyman grabbed one (9)
- 5 Long church to south of see? (4)
- 6 Popular drink I had found to be tasteless (7)
- 7 Hero's repeatedly pious in a minor way (5,5)
- 8 Support by a head of law-firm could be so described (5)
- 9 About to get famous, eliminating monarchy and achieving this? (6)
- 10 Feature of newspaper responsible for a row? Certainly not (6)
- 14 For one on own no allowance is made in speech (10)
- 17 Change of heart with anger produces a safety device (5,4)
- 18 Shoplifters, it could be said, of underwear (8)
- 20 After short month company will take short time to produce fruit (7)
- 21 Take for granted amount to be dumped in sea is variable (6)
- 22 Be merciful, keeping sabbath with few neighbours? (6)
- 24 Go on horse maintaining gravity in high ground (5)
- 26 Expert holds onto upper-class painting of little merit (4)

Celts' TV fears grow

Rugby Union

CHRIS HEWITT

Leading rugby figures in Wales, Scotland and Ireland are deeply concerned that satellite television's increasing control of broadcast rights will undermine the sport's attempt to establish itself as a genuine worldwide attraction.

The Celts, who are awaiting confirmation from BSkyB that a proposed multi-million pound deal has fallen through, are hoping to announce alternative agreements with terrestrial companies in the next few days.

Their problem is that the income guaranteed under those agreements is unlikely to approach the figures originally discussed with Rupert Murdoch's men. England, meanwhile, are sitting pretty, having settled an £87.5m deal with Sky

as well as a £20m revised jersey contract with Nike.

Yesterday, both the Welsh and Scottish unions insisted lucrative terrestrial deals were near finalisation. Charlie Bisset, the Scottish Rugby Union negotiator, said the Scots' agreement was satisfactory in terms of television exposure and income, while Vernon Pugh, the Welsh Rugby Union chairman, waxed lyrical about his country's deal, thought to be with BBC Wales.

However, it now seems certain that England's position as the richest, most powerful and most commercially attractive rugby nation will be reinforced, leaving the Celts as poor neighbours. A similar scenario has occurred south of the equator, where Murdoch's buy-up of New Zealand, South African and Australian rugby effectively ostracised many of the smaller countries - Western

Samoa, Fiji, Canada and Argentina - who were seen by many as essential components of the game's international fabric.

BSkyB have yet to give their side of the story, but it is common knowledge that senior company negotiators were less than amused by the rebellion against England's decision to agree a unilateral Five Nations broadcasting deal. Pugh is against any move to a satellite monopoly, claiming rugby needs the widest exposure as much as a bank account full of Murdoch money.

Negotiations over the rights to next season's expanded Heineken European Cup are likely to prove fractious and it is still not clear which terrestrial company, if any, will team up with Sky to broadcast England international matches when the current Five Nations Championship comes to an end.

Prize fund increased for Open

Golf

ANDY FARRELL

For anyone for whom holding aloft the old silver jug is not enough, the financial reward of winning golf's oldest crown is being brought into line with the other majors.

For the second year running, prize-money at the Open has been given a significant boost by the Royal & Ancient. This year's winner of the 126th Championship at Royal

Troon will receive £250,000, out of a total purse of £1.6m. Exactly double John Daly's winnings in 1995, the first prize shows an increase of £50,000 on what Tom Lehman took home last year. Nick Faldo won £200,000 at the US Masters and Steve Jones £283,000 at the US Open.

Further down the field, all those making the cut will receive at least £2,250, while the leading non-qualifiers can earn up to £1,000. Previously, all those who missed the cut received £650.

"We believe that the Open should continue to review the prize-money, not only at the top but throughout the field," Michael Bonallack, the secretary of the R&A, said.

"When combined with our far-reaching exemption policy and in recognition of the cost of competing in the championship for overseas players, we feel that we have put in place those two elements which effectively will maintain the international strength of the field."

MORSE

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